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STRIKE SQUADRON

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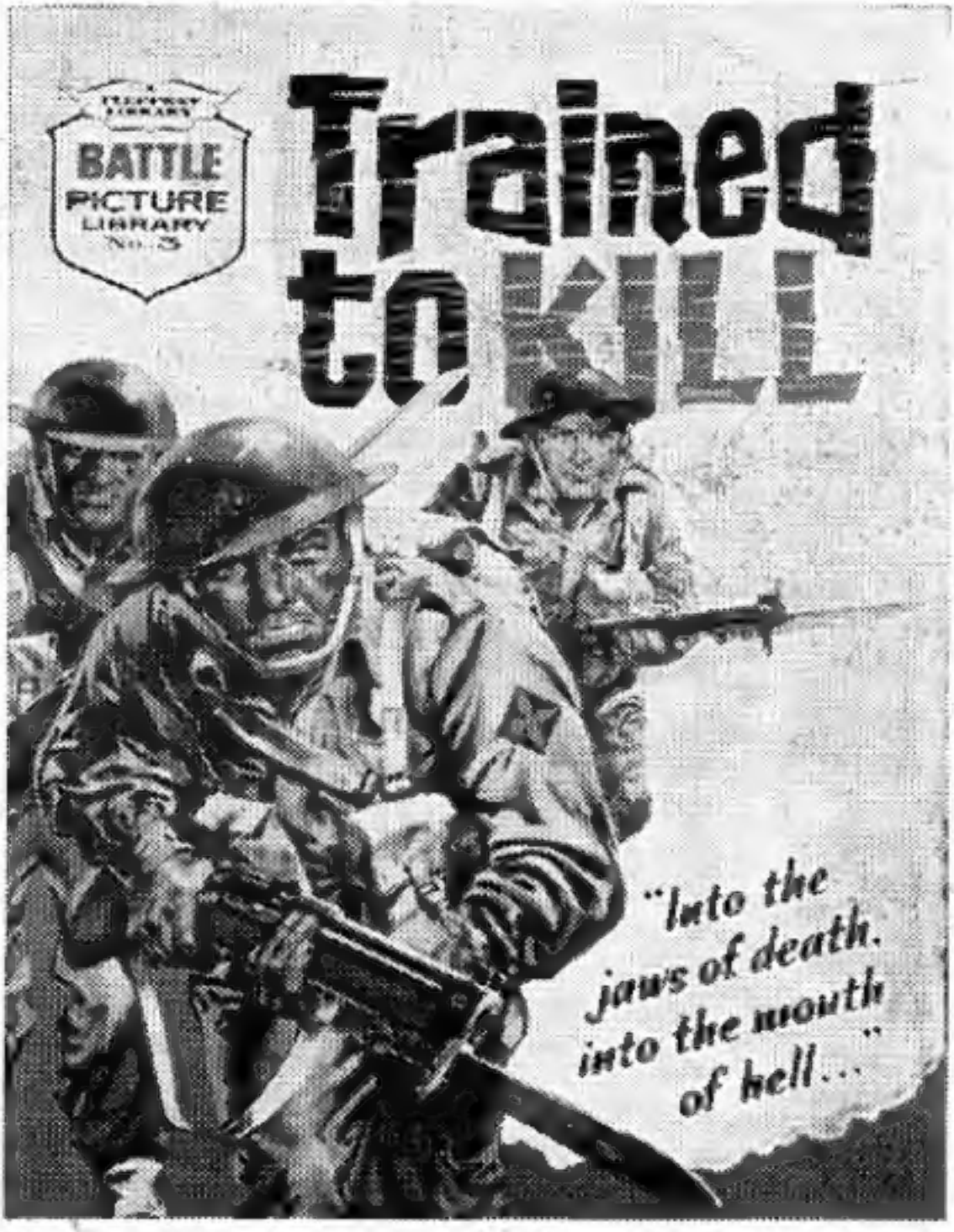

TWO Dramatic, All-action Issues Every Month

STRIKE SQUADRON

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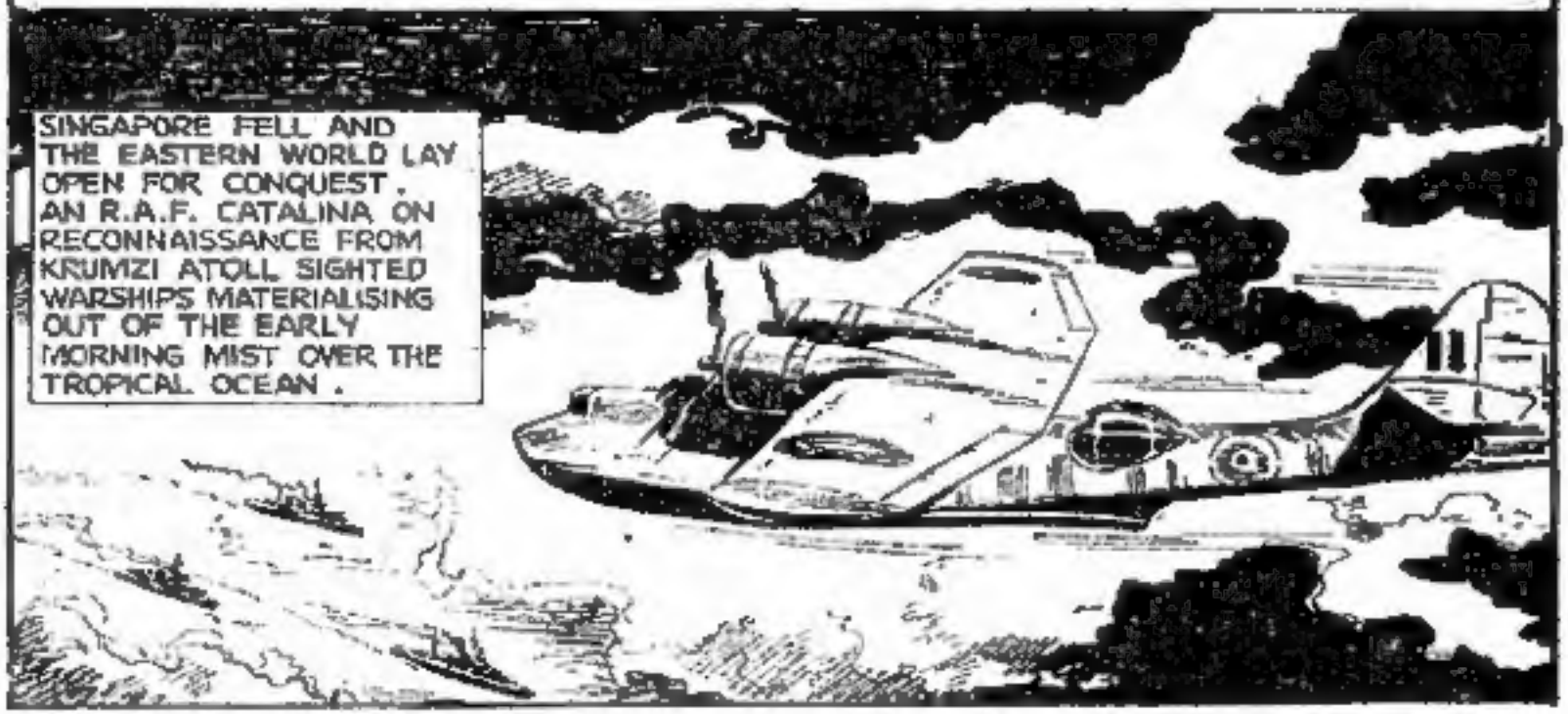
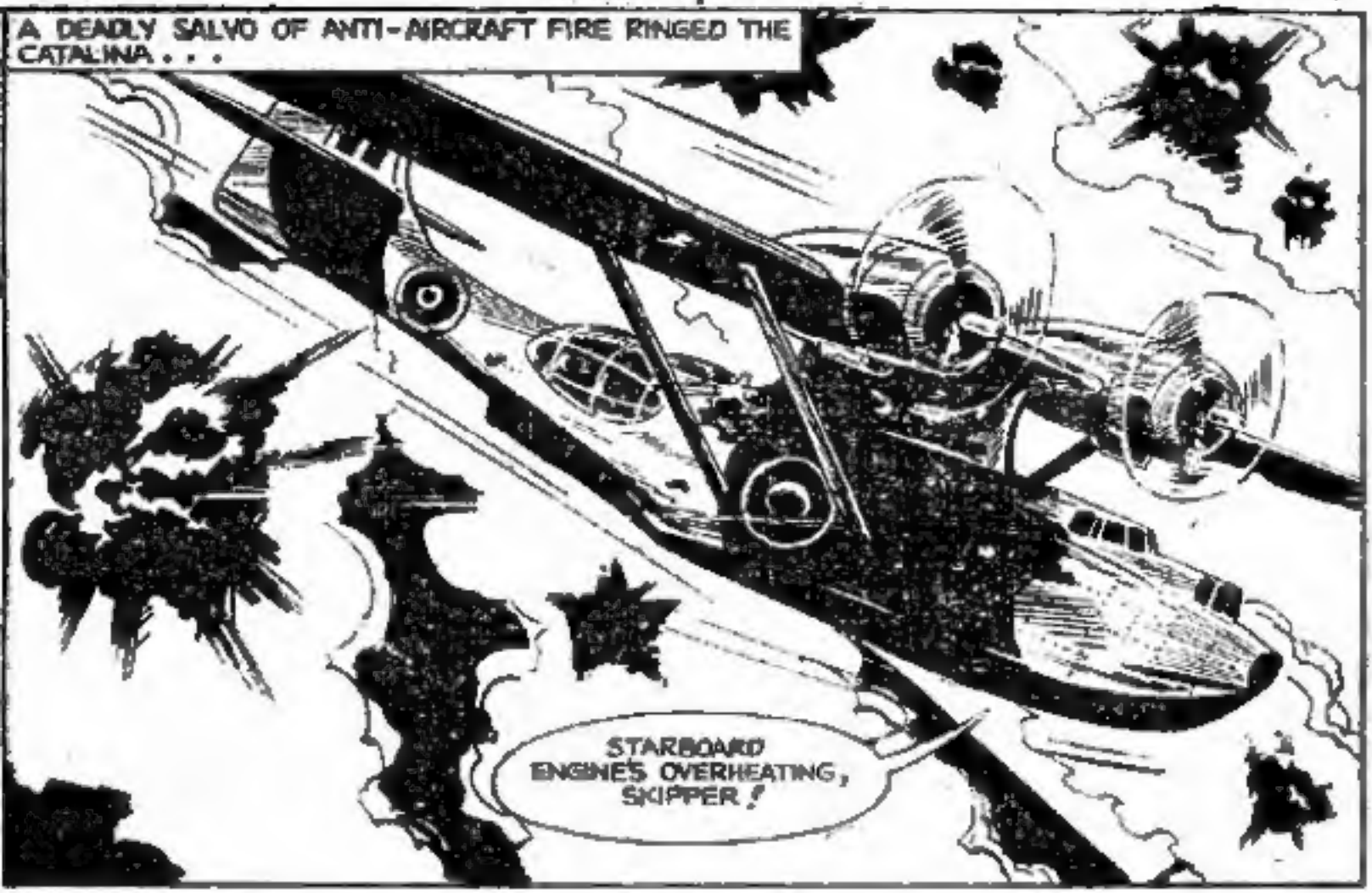
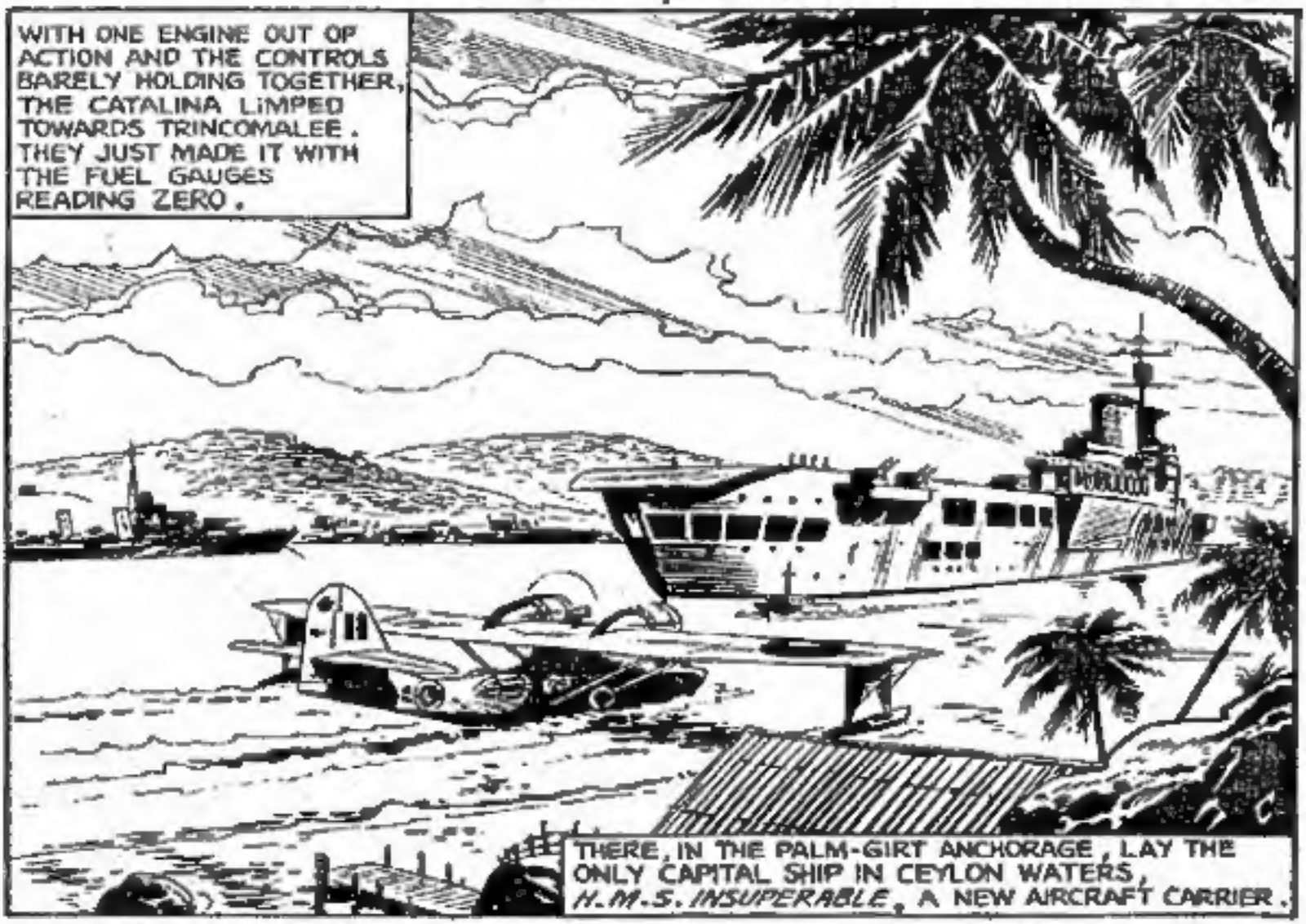
Chapter 1. CAPTAIN'S ORDERS




A DEADLY SALVO OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE RINGED THE CATALINA . . .
STARBOARD ENGINE'S OVERHEATING, SKIPPER!

CAN YOU HEAR ME ON THE INTER-COM? GOOD . . . LISTEN! THE RADIO'S SMASHED AND IN A BAD WAY . . . WE'RE LIKELY TO LOSE ONE ENGINE BUT WE'VE GOT TO REACH CEYLON TO TELL 'EM WHAT WE'VE SEEN.


WITH ONE ENGINE OUT OF ACTION AND THE CONTROLS BARELY HOLDING TOGETHER, THE CATALINA LIMPED TOWARDS TRINCOMALEE. THEY JUST MADE IT WITH THE FUEL GAUGES READING ZERO.
THERE, IN THE PALM-GIRT ANCHORAGE, LAY THE ONLY CAPITAL SHIP IN CEYLON WATERS, H.M.S. INSUPERABLE, A NEW AIRCRAFT CARRIER.

THE CATALINA'S PILOT AND NAVIGATOR WENT ABOARD AND WERE IMMEDIATELY TAKEN TO THE CAPTAIN OF INSUPERABLE BY ITS YOUNG COMMANDER-FLYING, MICHAEL WILLOWBY.
AND BY SOME FANTASTIC LUCK, SIR, THEY SENT NO ZEROS AFTER US.
I SEE . . ! WELL, WINGS! IT LOOKS AS IF I'M TO SEE MY FIRST ACTION IN THIS BOX OF FLYING TRICKS. WOULD TO HARRY IT WAS A PROPER SHIP O' THE LINE -

MICHAEL WILLOWBY TRIED TO BE HELPFUL.
IF YOU HAVE TO ATTEND A CONFERENCE, SIR, I'LL GET A PLANE READY TO FLY YOU OVER.
SEE HERE, YOUNG WILLOWBY! A CAPTAIN IS STILL NOT MAROONED THESE DAYS WITHOUT A TUPPENNY-HA'PENNY AEROPLANE – THANK THE STARS! I'VE NEVER FLOWN YET, AND I DOUBT THAT I SHALL SEE THE NECESSITY.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, THE C-IN-C, ADMIRAL SIR GODFREY SAMSON, RECEIVED A SIGNAL FROM TRINCOMALEE THAT CAUSED HIM GRAVE CONCERN...
THE SUPER HAS LANDED ON HER TORPEDO BOMBERS, SIR – AND SHE'S STEAMING SOUTH-EAST WITH HER DESTROYER ESCORT... BUT SHE'S LEFT HER FIGHTING WING BEHIND.
WHAT! SAILED WITHOUT FIGHTER COVER! CAPTAIN GLANVILLE MUST BE MAD! LET'S HOPE HE'S GOT THE VERY BEST OF REASONS – FOR HIS OWN SAKE – AND FOR EVERY HAND ABOARD...

Chapter 2. FIRST BLOOD

I DON'T LIKE THE RIG O' THIS SHIP AND I'LL ASK YOU FLYING PERSONNEL TO REMEMBER THAT IT *IS* A SHIP BEFORE IT IS A CONFOUNDED FLOATING AERODROME. AND THAT YOU BRANCH MEN ARE SAILORS BEFORE YOU'RE AIRMEN.

AYE, AYE, SIR!

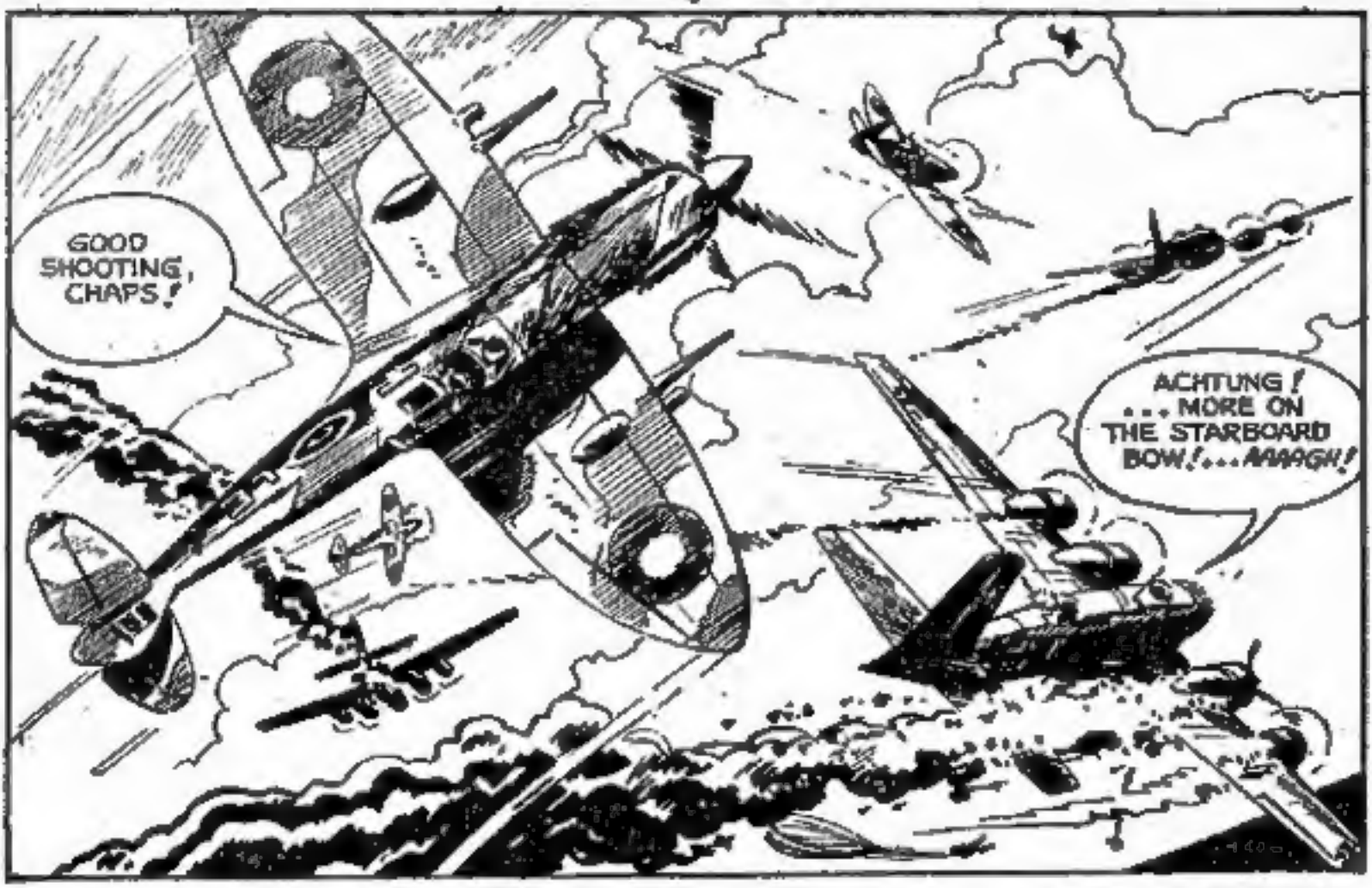
IT DID NOT LOOK AS IF IT WAS GOING TO BE A HAPPY SHIP.

CAPTAIN GLANVILLE CAME FROM A LONG LINE OF ADMIRALS, HIS TRADITIONS ROOTED IN THE SEA. NOW HE FOUND IT IRKSOME STEAMING STEADILY INTO WIND FOR FLYING OFF. IT WAS ALMOST AS IF HE WERE HAVING TO TAKE ORDERS FROM HIS YOUTHFUL COMMANDER-FLYING OUTSIDE.

AT LEAST IT'S *QUIETER* INSIDE ... NUMBER ONE! MY GREATEST REGRET IS THAT THE NAVY WAS NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR MY SON DICK. HE CHOSE TO TRANSFER TO THE AIR BRANCH, AND THE LORD HARRY ONLY KNOWS WHAT A FOOL HE'S MAKING OF HIMSELF SOMEWHERE NOW!

IT WAS ON THAT DAY THAT THE FIGHTER WING DREW FIRST BLOOD FOR THE "SUPER", AS THEY CAME TO CALL HER. THEY LOCATED THREE FOCKE WULF CONDORS STALKING A DISTANT CONVOY — AND TWO SEAFIRE FLIGHTS WENT INTO THE ATTACK ...

RED LEADER HERE ...FOLLOW ME IN, TWO AND THREE! TALLY HO!


GOOD SHOOTING, CHAPS!
ACHTUNG! ... MORE ON THE STARBOARD BOW!... AAAGH!

ELATED WITH THEIR FIRST SUCCESS, THE PILOTS DID VICTORY ROLLS AS THEY FLEW DOWN THE SHIP, WATCHED BY THE ENTHUSIASTIC WILLOWBY FROM HIS EYRIE ON THE CARRIER'S ISLAND.
THREE ENEMY PLANES SHOT DOWN! THIS SHOULD PLEASE THE OLD MAN!

BUT THE CAPTAIN WAS FAR FROM PLEASED. HE ROARED FOR HIS COMMANDER FLYING . . .

WHAT IN BLUE PETER IS ALL THIS! THEY'RE LATE BACK FROM PATROL— AND WHAT DO THEY DO WHEN THEY RETURN? BALLY AEROBATICS!

THEY'RE JUST SIGNALLING THEIR VICTORIES, SIR.

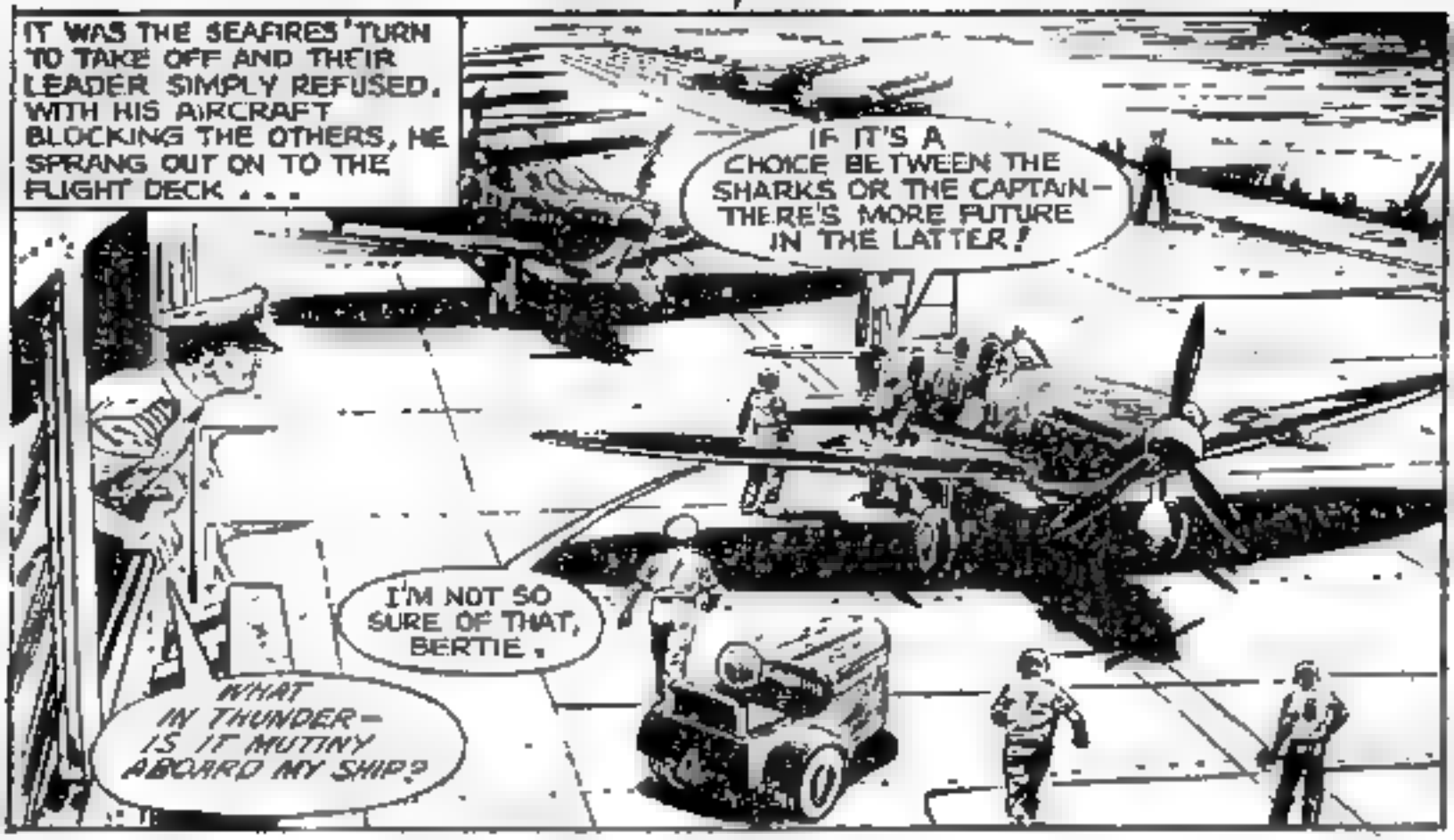
FOR'ARD THROUGH THE BARRIER WITH NUMBER TWO! PREPARE TO LAND ON NUMBER THREE!

HUMPH! I SUPPOSE WE'LL LEARN TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S WAYS. NEVERTHELESS, SEE THAT THOSE THREE PILOTS HAVE EXTRA SQUADRON DUTIES, WINGS!

THAT WAS THE FIRST OF MANY REGRETTABLE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AS THEY SAILED INTO TROPICAL WATERS. FINALLY ONE DAY THE CAPTAIN REFUSED TO TURN FULLY INTO WIND FOR A FLY-OFF. THE SWORDFISH SOMEHOW GOT AWAY WITH ONLY ONE ACCIDENT . . .

SIGNAL A DESTROYER TO PICK UP THE CREW, NUMBER ONE! IT'S A RISK NAVAL FLYERS MUST TAKE. WE'RE AT WAR AND IT WOULD BE SUICIDE NOT TO ZIG-ZAG IN SUBMARINE WATERS!

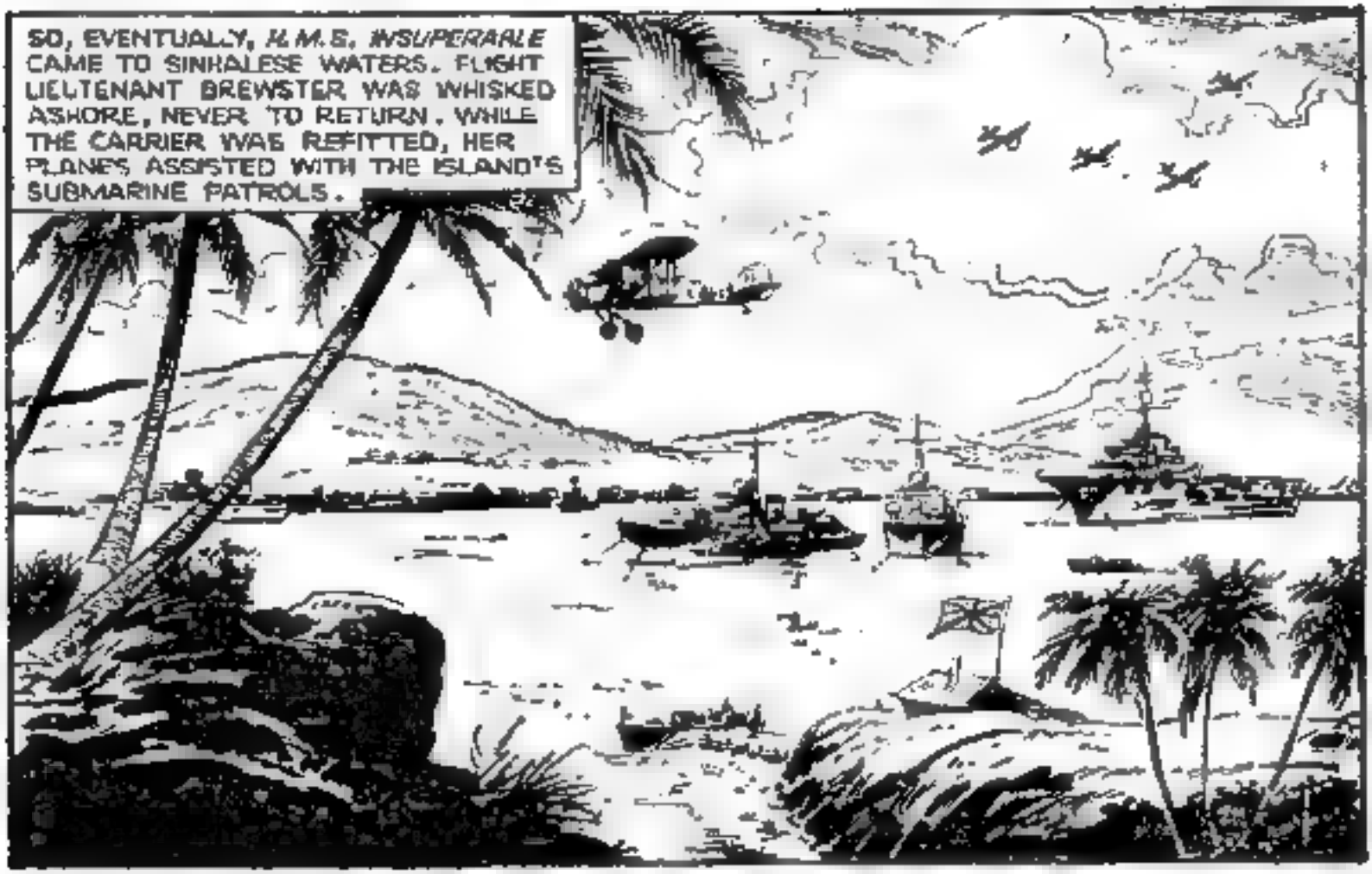
ONE SWORDFISH IS IN THE SEA, SIR!


IT WAS THE SEAFIRES' TURN TO TAKE OFF AND THEIR LEADER SIMPLY REFUSED. WITH HIS AIRCRAFT BLOCKING THE OTHERS, HE SPRANG OUT ON TO THE FLIGHT DECK . . .
IF IT'S A CHOICE BETWEEN THE SHARKS OR THE CAPTAIN— THERE'S MORE FUTURE IN THE LATTER!
I'M NOT SO SURE OF THAT, BERTIE.
WHAT IN THUNDER— IS IT MUTINY ABOARD MY SHIP?

WILLOWBY, DEEPLY TROUBLED, DASHED OVER TO INVESTIGATE.
THE OLD MAN'S BLOWING HIS TOP!
HE IS—IS HE? IT'S ALL VERY WELL FOR THOSE STRINGBAGS. THEY'RE SLOW AND AS STABLE AS OLD HARRY. BUT FEEL THE WIND, MICHAEL . . . EVERY SPIT WOULD GO STRAIGHT INTO THE WATER!

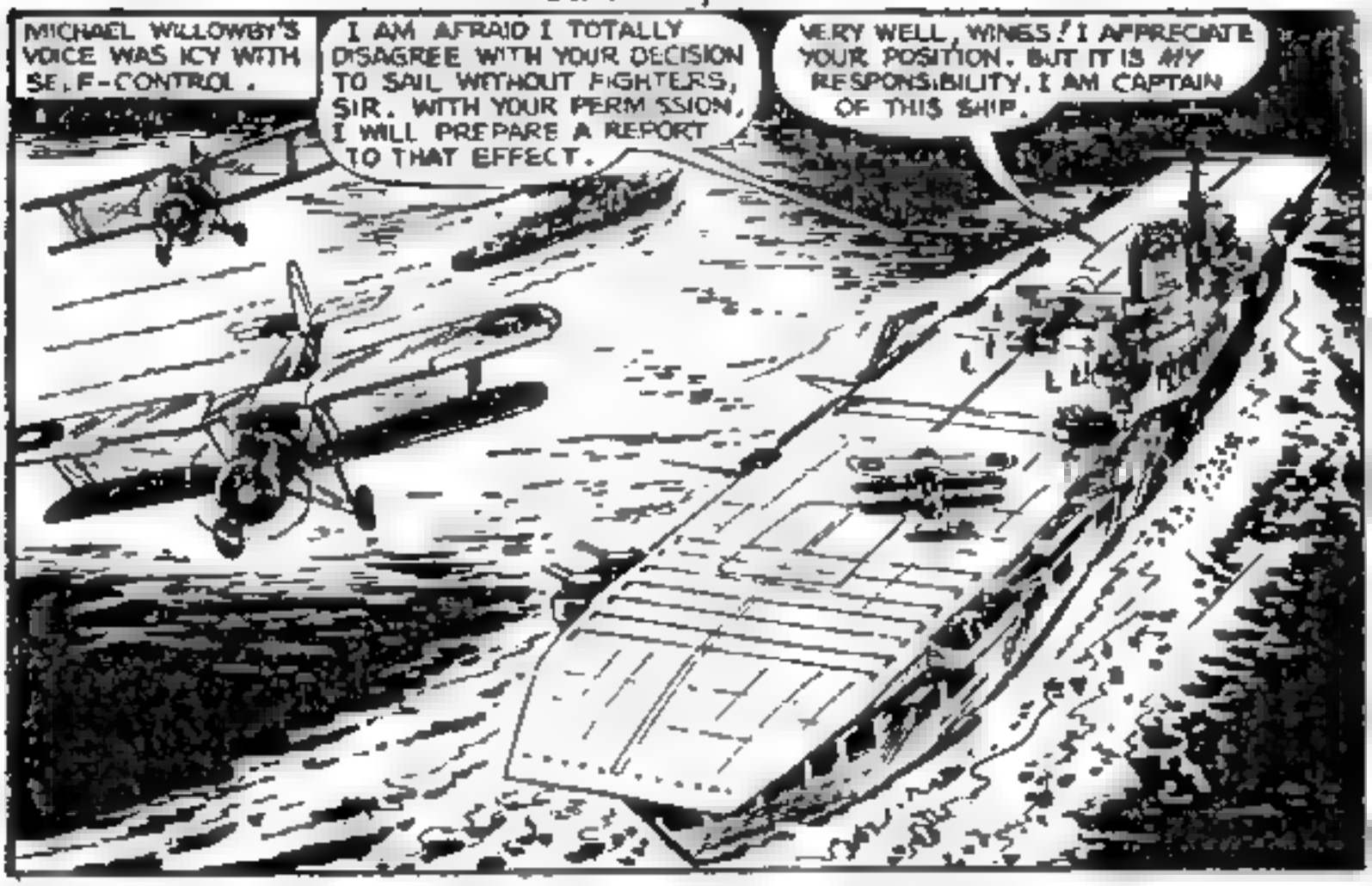
MICHAEL WILLOWBY DID . . . TOOK A DEEP, APPREHENSIVE BREATH . . . AND WAVED THE "NO FLYING" SIGNAL. A FEW SECONDS LATER, A STENTORIAN VOICE CAME OVER THE TANNOY . . .
WELL, YOU SEEM TO HAVE MADE YOUR POINT, COMMANDER WILLOWBY . . . BUT YOU WILL PERSONALLY BRING THAT PILOT TO THE BRIDGE!
GOOD LUCK, BERTIE!

AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, BERTIE BREWSTER, THE OFFENDING PILOT, WAS ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING R.A.F. MEN STILL FLYING WITH THE FLEET . . .
I CONSIDER HE WAS JUSTIFIED, SIR!
WE WILL DISCUSS THAT LATER, COMMANDER. NOW, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BREWSTER! THERE IS ONE THING I WILL NOT HAVE ON MY SHIP, AND THAT IS MUTINY! I SHALL RETURN YOU TO THE AIR FORCE AT TRINCOMALEE WITH MY REPORT. WHAT THEY DO WITH YOU WILL BE NO CONCERN OF MINE.


SO, EVENTUALLY, H.M.S. INVINCIBLE CAME TO SINHALESE WATERS. FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BREWSTER WAS WHISKED ASHORE, NEVER TO RETURN. WHILE THE CARRIER WAS REFITTED, HER PLANES ASSISTED WITH THE ISLAND'S SUBMARINE PATROLS.

THEN CAME THE CATALINA WITH ITS VITAL SIGHTING REPORT AND THE SIGNAL FROM THE NAVAL C-IN-C TO GO OUT AND MEET THE JAPANESE FORCE. AS THEY STEAMED INTO THE OPEN SEA, CAPTAIN GLANVILLE SENT FOR COMMANDER-FLYING.
WITH ANY OTHER BALLY SHIP WE'D SAIL TO MEET THE ENEMY, AND THAT'D BE THAT! BUT NOW WE HAVE TO HANG AROUND FLYING ON AIRCRAFT! COMMANDER WILLOWEY, WE LAND ON THE T.B.R.s., BUT WE'LL BE LEAVING THE FIGHTER SQUADRONS BEHIND. WE CANNOT AFFORD THE TIME.
BUT, SIR...

BUT, SIR NOTHING! DO YOU REALISE WHICH WAY THE WIND'S BLOWING? FULL ASTERN ON OUR COURSE. IT MEANS STEAMING DIRECTLY AWAY FROM THE ENEMY WHILE WE LAND ON EACH SQUADRON. AS SOON AS THE LAST TORPEDO BOMBER IS ABOARD, WE TURN ABOUT!

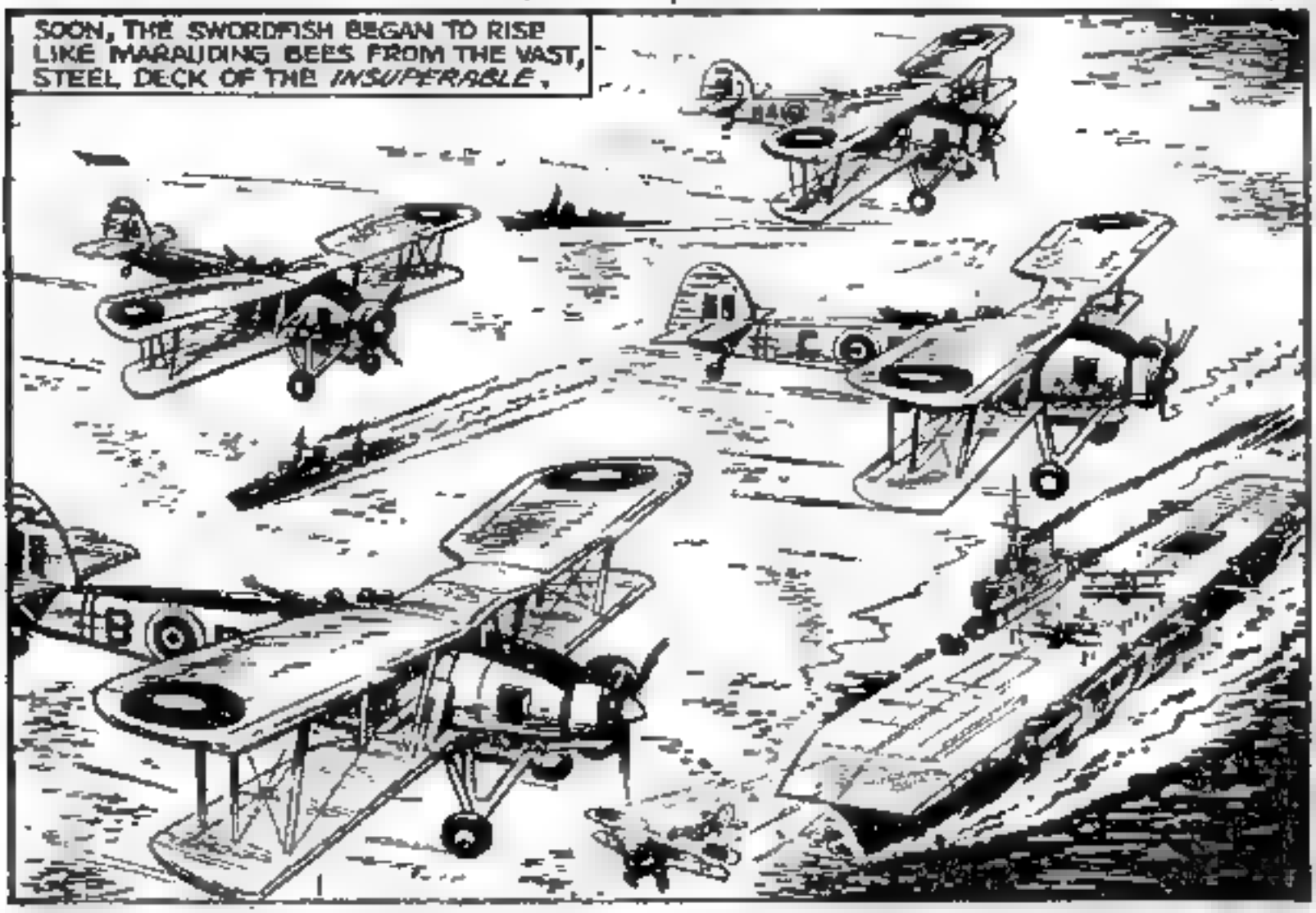

MICHAEL WILLOWBY'S VOICE WAS ICY WITH SELF-CONTROL.
I AM AFRAID I TOTALLY DISAGREE WITH YOUR DECISION TO SAIL WITHOUT FIGHTERS, SIR. WITH YOUR PERMISSION, I WILL PREPARE A REPORT TO THAT EFFECT.
VERY WELL, WINGS! I APPRECIATE YOUR POSITION. BUT IT IS MY RESPONSIBILITY. I AM CAPTAIN OF THIS SHIP.

THERE IS ONE OTHER THING, SIR. HERE IS THE NAME OF...OF...
WELL, MAN, WHAT IS IT? HERE, LET ME SEE..!

THE REPLACEMENT FOR THE SWORDFISH PILOT— INJURED LANDING EARLIER IN THE SEA... SUB LIEUTENANT (A) RICHARD GLANVILLE, R.N.V.R. YOUR SON, SIR!
DICK! HERE ON MY SHIP... AS A BRANCH PILOT! THEY COULD HAVE SPARED ME... THAT!
FOR CAPTAIN GLANVILLE IT WAS A LAST BITTER TRICK OF FORTUNE.

THERE WAS NO TIME FOR FATHER AND SON TO MEET. THERE WERE HOURS OF WORK LOADING UP THE SWORDFISH IN THE CROWDED HANGAR AND ARRANGING THEM AFT, WHICH COMMANDER - FLYING HAD TO SUPERVISE.
GLAD TO HAVE YOU ABOARD, DICK... BETTER LEAVE A FAMILY REUNION TILL LATER. WE'RE STILL NOT QUITE SHIP-SHAPE. YOU ALL SET?
YES, THANK YOU, SIR! HOPE I DON'T LET THE OLD MAN DOWN. I HEAR HE'S NOT QUITE USED TO US CHAPS YET...

THAT'S THE UNDERSTATEMENT OF THE DAY! GOOD LUCK, DICK!
I'LL WARM HER UP FOR YOU, SIR.


SOON, THE SWORDFISH BEGAN TO RISE LIKE MARAUDING BEES FROM THE VAST, STEEL DECK OF THE *INSUPERABLE*.

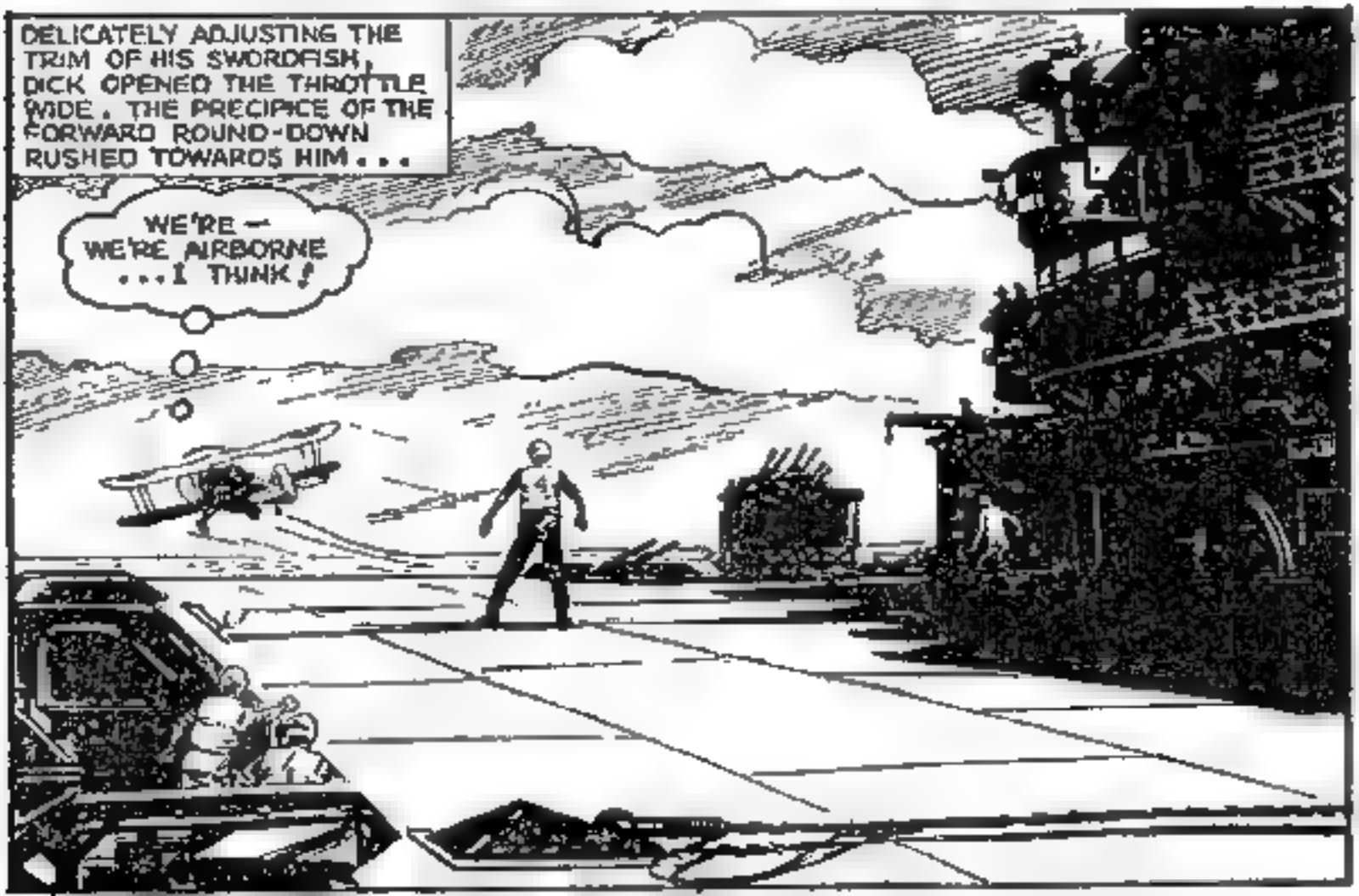
THE LAST AIRCRAFT TO TAKE OFF WAS SUB-LIEUTENANT GLANVILLE'S ... AND AS HE TESTED HIS CONTROLS, HE REALISED TO HIS HORROR THAT HIS PORT AILERON WAS JAMMED FAST ...
WHAT IS IT, SKIPPER?
THE PORT AILERON! THIS *WOULD* HAPPEN TO *ME* JUST NOW!
I CAN'T MAKE FLYING CONTROL UNDERSTAND, SIR! THEY'RE STILL SIGNALLING TO TAKE OFF.

DICK HURRIEDLY CLIMBED OUT AND RAN OVER TO THE SPEAKING TUBE ON THE ISLAND.
HERE YOU ARE, SIR!
I *MUST* EXPLAIN! WE'D NEVER MAKE IT!

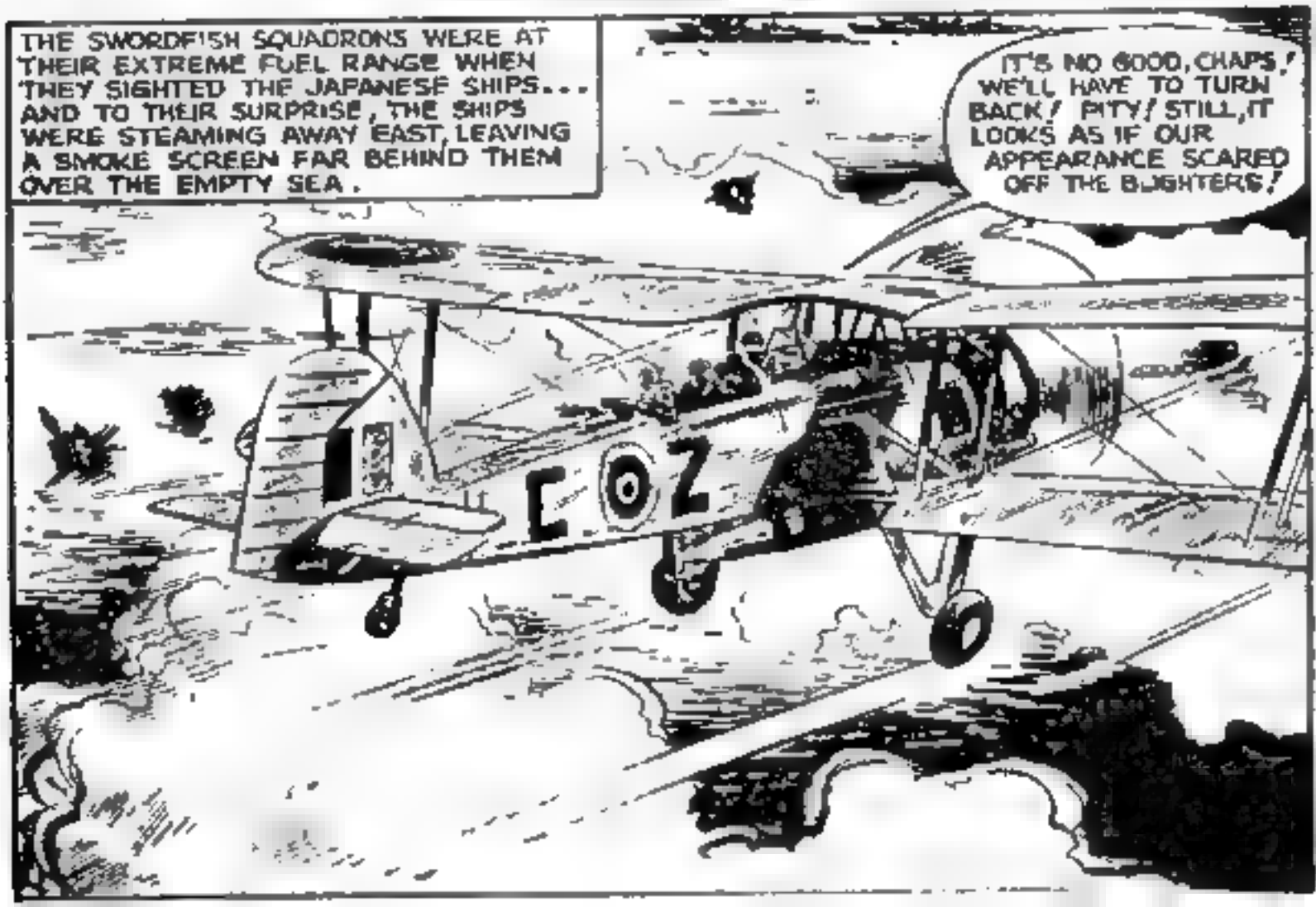
AT THAT MOMENT AN ANGRY CAPTAIN WAS STORMING UP TO COMMANDER-FLYING . . .
WHAT IN THUNDER IS THAT PILOT DOING?
IT'S . . . ER . . . YOUR . . . IT'S SUB-LIEUTENANT GLANVILLE, SIR! HE SAYS . . .

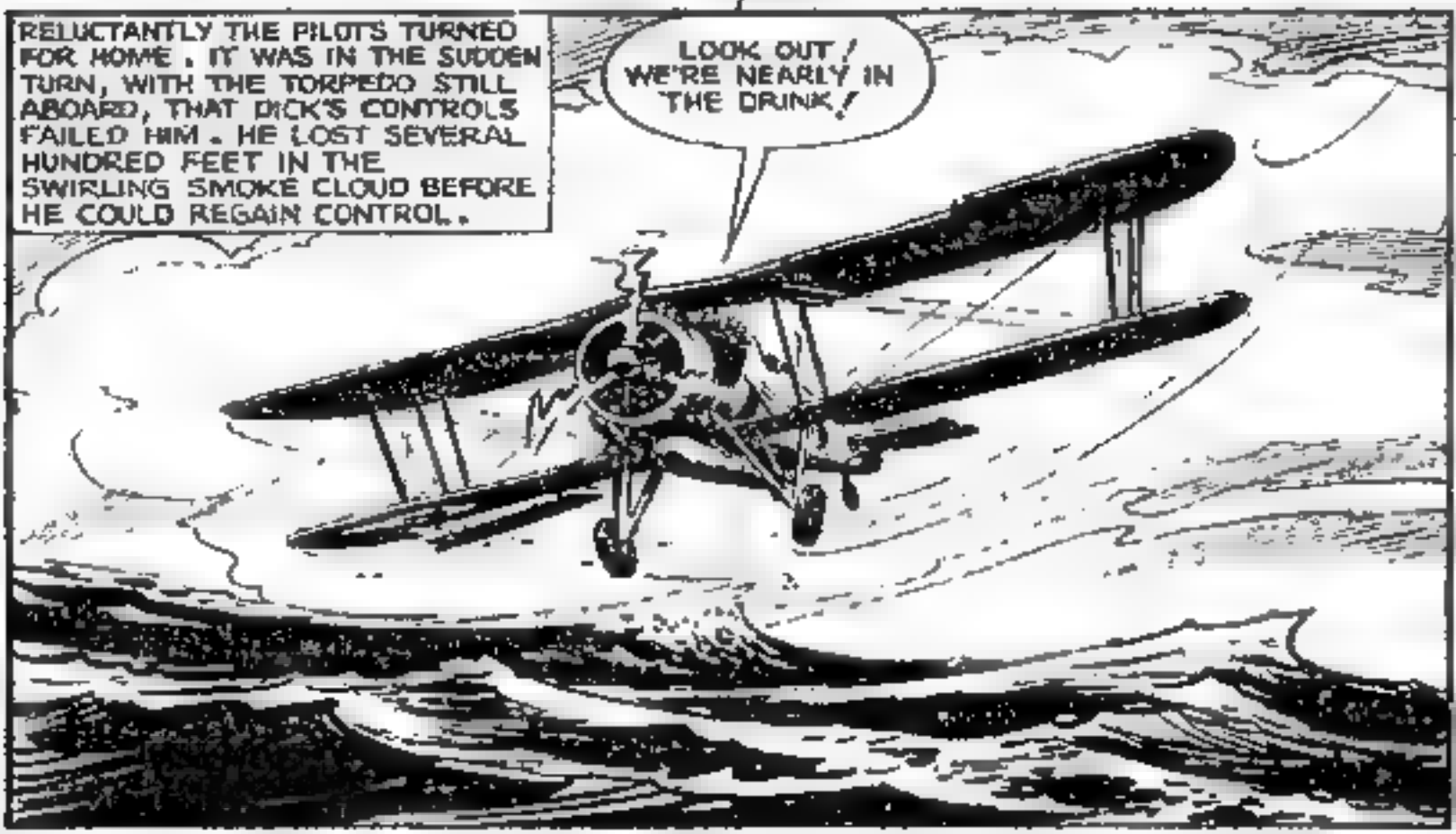
SUDDENLY THE CAPTAIN WAS OVERCOME WITH ANGER AND EXTREME EMBARRASSMENT AT THE THOUGHT THAT HIS OWN SON OF ALL PEOPLE SHOULD DISGRACE THE SHIP . . .
I REFUSE TO HEAR ANOTHER WORD, D'YE HEAR! SWITCH ON THE TANNOY LOUDSPEAKERS!

THEY ALL HEARD IT — EVERY HAND ON THE SHIP — THE BLISTERING COMMAND OF THE OUTRAGED CAPTAIN.
THE INSUBORDINATE PILOT OF THE REMAINING AIRCRAFT WILL TAKE OFF INSTANTLY!
VERY WELL, CAPTAIN GLANVILLE. BUT IT'S ROTTEN BAD LUCK ON MY CREW ...IT'S TEN TO ONE WE DITCH.
ANGRY HIMSELF NOW, DICK STRODE BACK TO HIS PLANE — HIS JAW SET GRIMLY.


DELICATELY ADJUSTING THE TRIM OF HIS SWORDFISH, DICK OPENED THE THROTTLE WIDE. THE PRECIPICE OF THE FORWARD ROUND-DOWN RUSHED TOWARDS HIM...
WE'RE — WE'RE AIRBORNE ...I THINK!

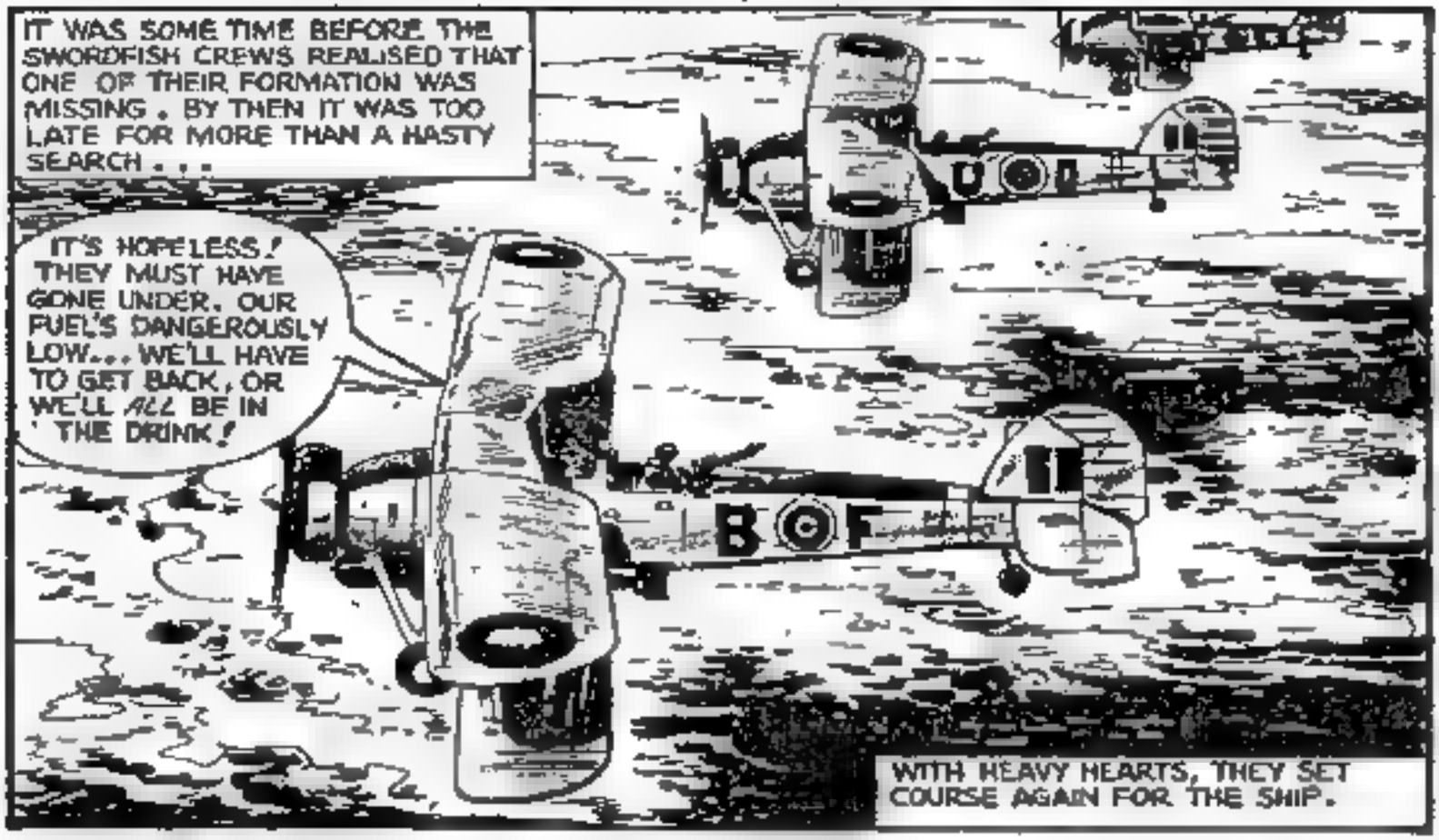
CAPTAIN GLANVILLE SAID NOTHING... BUT WILLOWBY NOTICED THAT HE FOLLOWED, THROUGH HIS GLASSES, THE WAVERING FLIGHT OF THE SINGLE SWORDFISH AWAY LOW OVER THE WATER... UNTIL IT FINALLY BEGAN TO GAIN HEIGHT IN THE FAR DISTANCE, THE SENSITIVE WILLOWBY BROKE THE SILENCE...
HIS PORT AILERON'S JAMMED, SIR – IT CAN BE PRETTY TRICKY WITH A TORPEDO ABOARD.
THANK YOU, WINGS! THAT'S ALL... FLY-OFF COMPLETED! PORT TWENTY, HELMSMAN!
AND CAPTAIN GLANVILLE, R.N. SPOKE NO MORE ON THE MATTER.


THE SWORDFISH SQUADRONS WERE AT THEIR EXTREME FUEL RANGE WHEN THEY SIGHTED THE JAPANESE SHIPS... AND TO THEIR SURPRISE, THE SHIPS WERE STEAMING AWAY EAST, LEAVING A SMOKE SCREEN FAR BEHIND THEM OVER THE EMPTY SEA.
IT'S NO GOOD, CHAPS! WE'LL HAVE TO TURN BACK! PITY! STILL, IT LOOKS AS IF OUR APPEARANCE SCARED OFF THE BLIGHTERS!
E OZ

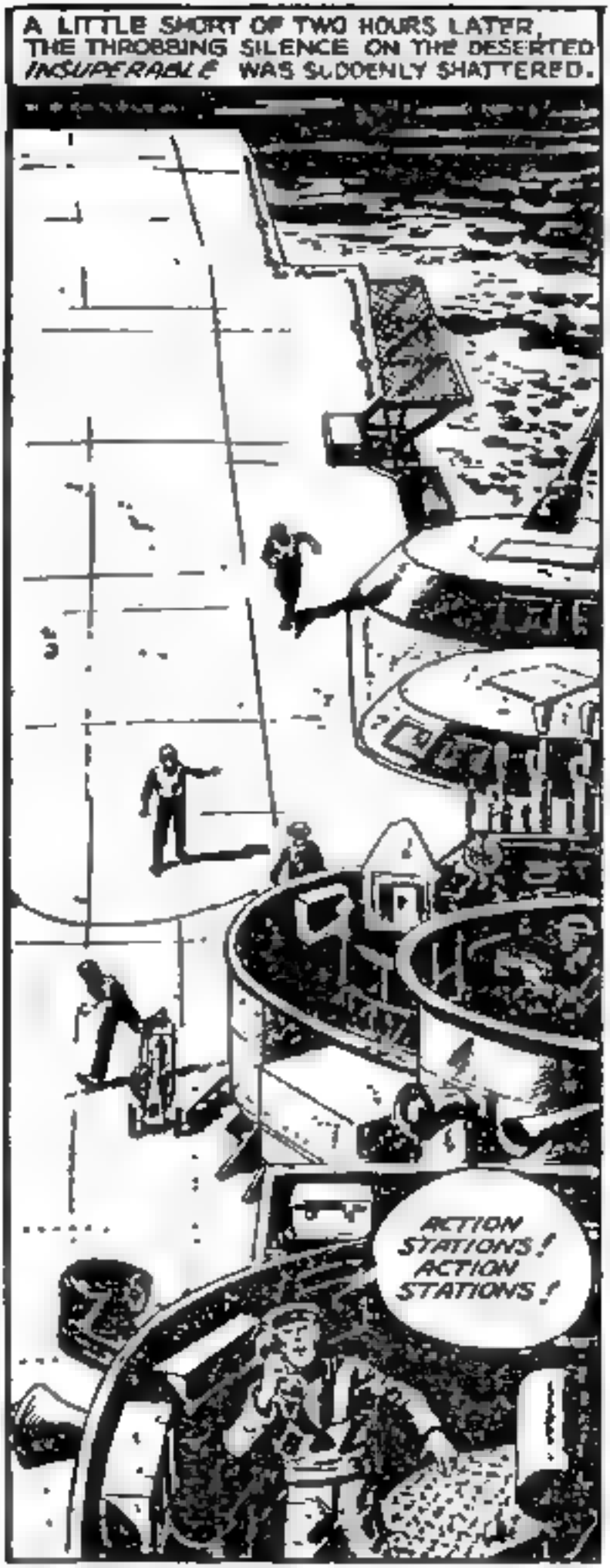

RELUCTANTLY THE PILOTS TURNED FOR HOME. IT WAS IN THE SUDDEN TURN, WITH THE TORPEDO STILL ABOARD, THAT DICK'S CONTROLS FAILED HIM. HE LOST SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET IN THE SWIRLING SMOKE CLOUD BEFORE HE COULD REGAIN CONTROL.
LOOK OUT! WE'RE NEARLY IN THE DRINK!

A SPLIT SECOND LATER, THE HEAVY PLANE WAS PLUNGING UNDER WATER. DESPERATELY DICK THUMPED AGAIN AND AGAIN AT THE RELEASE BUTTON OF HIS HARNESS . . .
I CAN'T MAKE IT! I CAN'T...

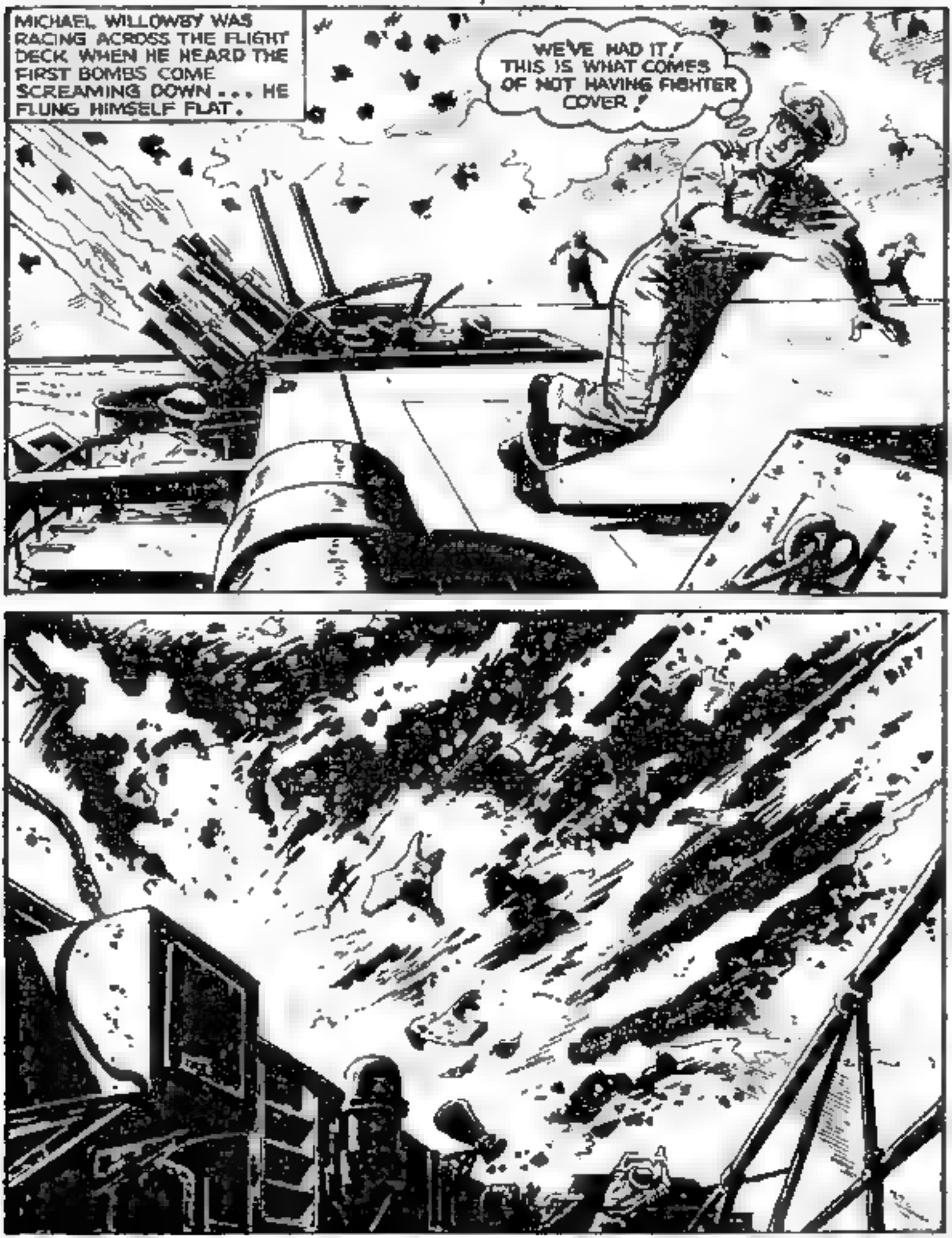
HIS LUNGS FELT AS IF THEY WERE BURSTING — THEN SUDDENLY, THE HARNESS LOOSENED, AND HE SHOT UPWARDS TO THE SURFACE . . .
THERE HE IS! QUICK, GRAB HIM!


IT WAS SOME TIME BEFORE THE SWORDFISH CREWS REALISED THAT ONE OF THEIR FORMATION WAS MISSING. BY THEN IT WAS TOO LATE FOR MORE THAN A HASTY SEARCH...
IT'S HOPELESS! THEY MUST HAVE GONE UNDER. OUR FUEL'S DANGEROUSLY LOW... WE'LL HAVE TO GET BACK, OR WE'LL ALL BE IN THE DRINK!
WITH HEAVY HEARTS, THEY SET COURSE AGAIN FOR THE SHIP.

BUT THEIR HEARTS WOULD HAVE BEEN HEAVIER STILL— HAD THEY REALISED THAT OVER THE HORIZON TO THE NORTH-EAST, A JAPANESE ADMIRAL IN HIS FLAGSHIP WAS FEELING ELATED...
HONORABLE ADMIRAL! CRUISER SQUADRON HAVE TURNED ABOUT AS ORDERED, SIR.
GOOD! CLEVER TO HAVE LET FORMER FLYING-BOAT ESCAPE AFTER ALL... BRITISH CARRIER NOW DRAWN FROM LAIR AND WITHOUT AIRCRAFT. OUR OWN AIR STRIKE WILL NOW GO IN TO DESTROY HER... BANZAI!


A LITTLE SHORT OF TWO HOURS LATER, THE THROBBING SILENCE ON THE DESERTED INDEFATIGABLE WAS SUDDENLY SHATTERED.
ACTION STATIONS! ACTION STATIONS!

JAPANESE BOMBERS MADE THE FIRST STRIKE . . .


MICHAEL WILLOWBY WAS RACING ACROSS THE FLIGHT DECK WHEN HE HEARD THE FIRST BOMBS COME SCREAMING DOWN... HE FLUNG HIMSELF FLAT.
WE'VE HAD IT! THIS IS WHAT COMES OF NOT HAVING FIGHTER COVER!
DIVE!

BLACKNESS OVERWHELMED WILLOWBY AND WHEN HE OPENED HIS EYES SOME MINUTES LATER, HE STARED IN HORROR AT THE GHASTLY SIGHT BESIDE HIM. SLOWLY THE VOICE ON THE TANNOY PENETRATED HIS CONSCIOUSNESS.
CALLING DAMAGE CONTROL PARTIES! FIRE IN THE HANGAR AFT! WILL SOMEONE FIND COMMANDER-FLYING . . .
WHERE AM I? ■■ MERCIFUL STARS! POOR BLIGHTERS!

FIRE IN THE HANGAR AFT . . . THE PLACE MUST BE REEKING WITH PETROL FUMES! MICHAEL SCRAMBLED TO HIS FEET AND CLATTERED DOWN A LADDER TO THE HANGAR DECK. THE AFTER END WAS AN INFERNO . . .
THE SPRINKLERS — GET THE SPRINKLERS GOING! AND BRING THE LIFT DOWN — TO GET THE FLAMES OUT!

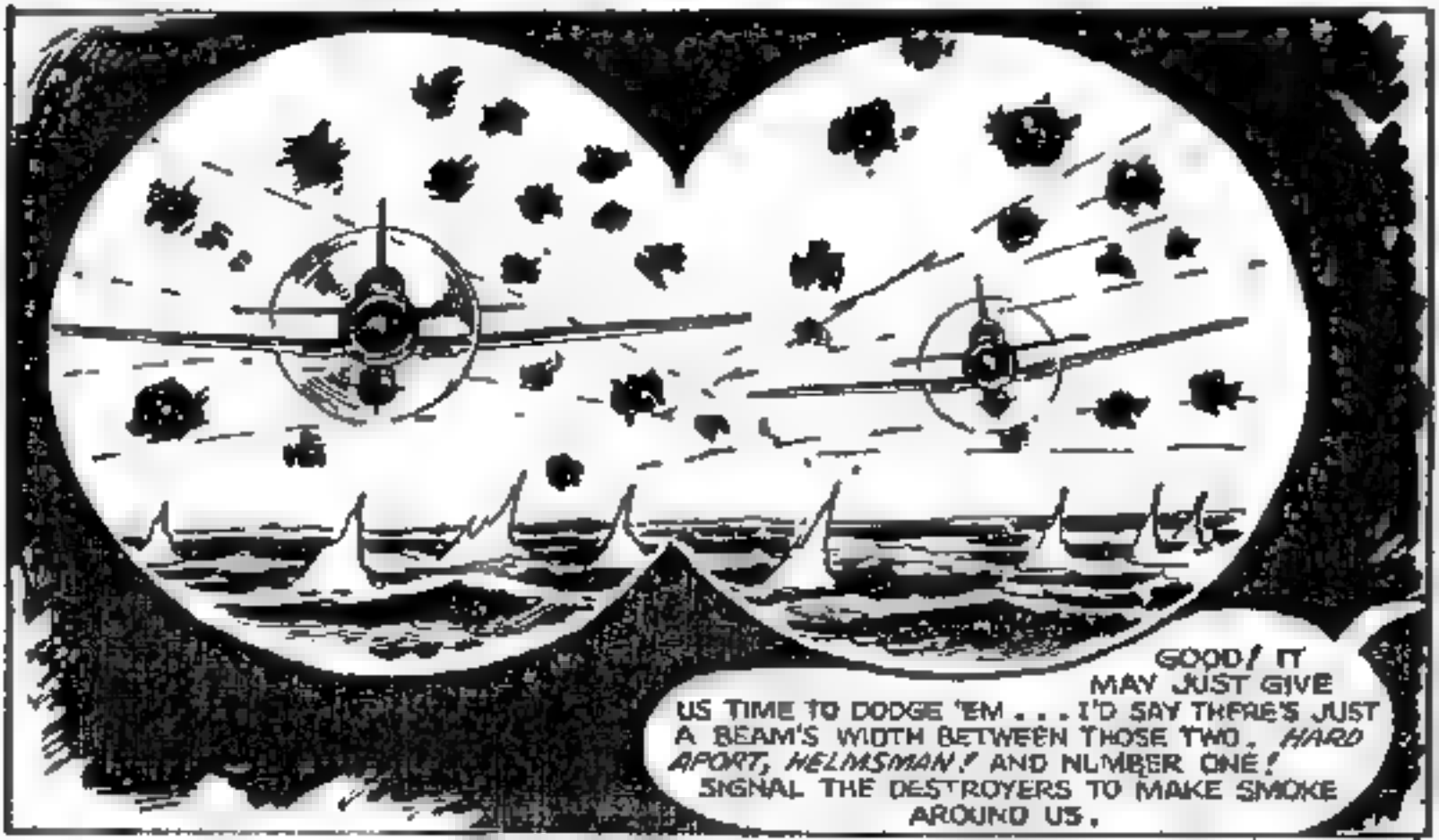
SOON, THE WORST OF THE FIRE WAS UNDER CONTROL BUT OMINOUS THUDS WERE STILL RINGING THROUGH THE SHIP. SUDDENLY, THE TELEPHONE RANG . . .
CAPTAIN SPEAKING! IS THAT WILLOWBY? I HEAR YOU'RE DOING NOBLE WORK DOWN THERE, WINGS . . . BUT I'D LIKE YOU ON THE BRIDGE . . . QUICKLY!
AYE AYE, SIR! RIGHT AWAY!

NOW IN THE HECK DID HE KNOW I WAS DOWN HERE ANYWAY?
HE KNOWS EVERYTHING, SIR . . . I'VE SAILED WITH CAPTAIN GLANVILLE BEFORE, HE'S A BLINKING MARVEL IN ACTION!

MICHAEL RAN ACROSS THE OPEN FLIGHT-DECK THROUGH BILLOWING SMOKE . . .
HECK! HOW MUCH MORE CAN THE OLD SUPER STAND! THIS IS MURDER!

MICHAEL REACHED THE COMPASS PLATFORM . . . TO FIND THE CAPTAIN, APPARENTLY QUITE IMPERTURBED. AMID ALL THE NOISE AND CONFUSION, HE WORE A QUIET AND COMMANDING DIGNITY, AS IF THIS WAS HIS ELEMENT.
THERE'S FLOODING FOR'ARD! SEAL THE WATER-TIGHT DOORS!
YOU WANTED ME, SIR?
GOOD, YOU'VE COME, WINGS! QUICKLY, I WANT YOUR HELP! LOOK!

TORPEDO BOMBERS! I'M A NEW BOY WITH THESE. TELL ME QUICKLY— AT WHAT RANGE DO THEY DROP 'EM?
WITH THE JAPS, SIR, FROM TWO TO THREE HUNDRED YARDS. UP TO A HUNDRED FEET OFF THE SEA.


GOOD! IT MAY JUST GIVE US TIME TO DODGE 'EM . . . I'D SAY THERE'S JUST A BEAM'S WIDTH BETWEEN THOSE TWO. HARD APORT, HELMSMAN! AND NUMBER ONE! SIGNAL THE DESTROYERS TO MAKE SMOKE AROUND US.

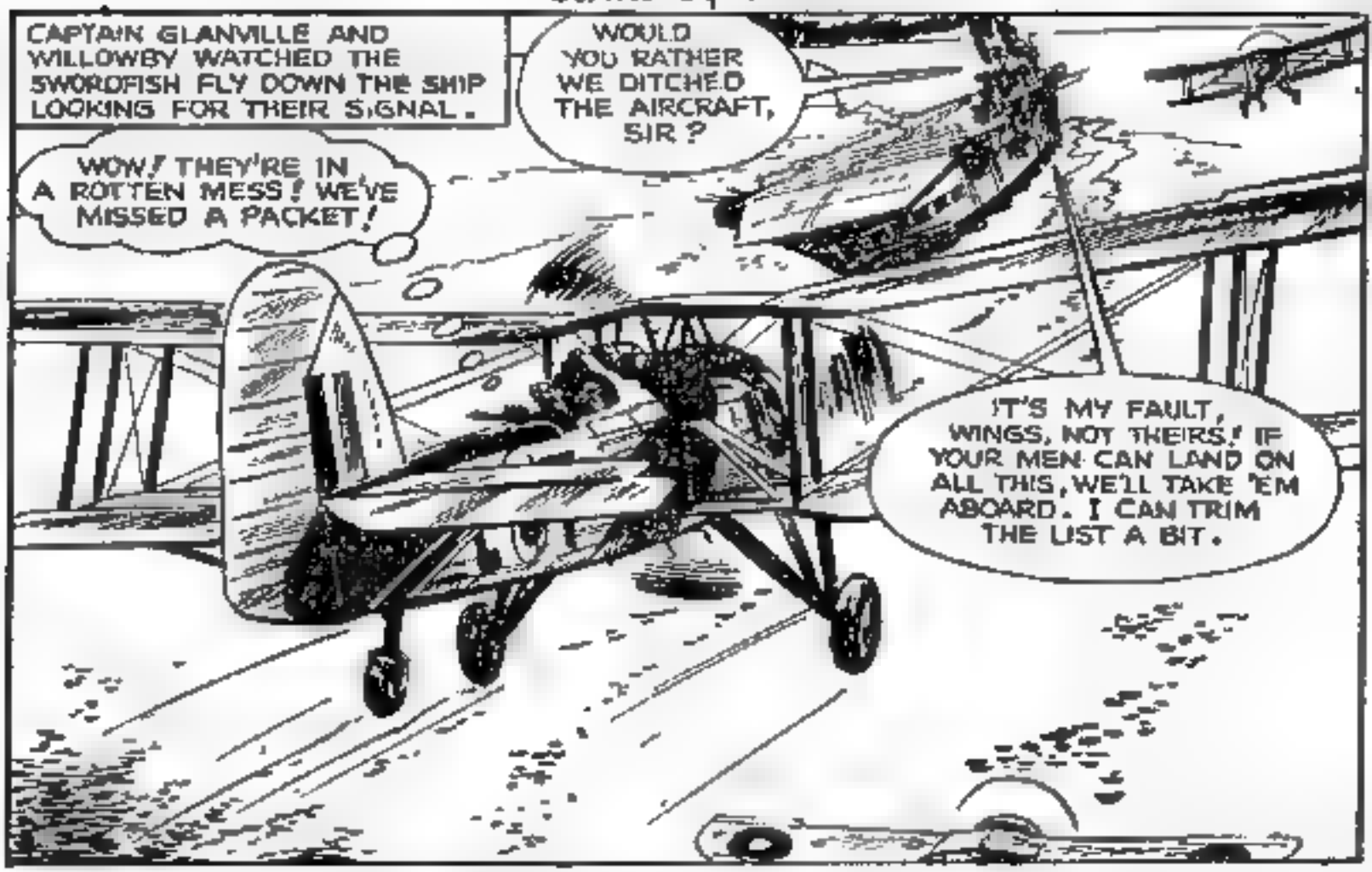
THE BULKHEADS GROANED AS THE CARRIER HEAVED HER THIRTY THOUSAND-TON STEEL HULL ROUND UNDER THE SHORT REIN OF THE HELMSMAN . . . EVEN AS THE SHADOW OF ONE OF THE BOMBERS LEAPED ACROSS THE DECK .
GOT THE YELLOW BLIGHTERS!
MISSED US! OLD DICK'S A BLINKING MARVEL!

[redacted] STARBOARD BOW, SIR!
CUT TO HALF AHEAD, STARBOARD ENGINES! FULL AHEAD PORT! AND HARD A-STARBOARD! NOW, RIGHT BETWEEN 'EM AGAIN!
IF WE EVER SURVIVE . . . I'LL NEVER SAY ANOTHER WORD AGAINST THIS CAPTAIN!
HMS

THEY WERE NEARLY THROWN OFF THEIR FEET AS THE SHIP AGAIN VIOLENTLY HEELED OVER AND ONCE MORE, THE TORPEDO TRAILS SPED JUST CLEAR. THE NEXT ATTACK WAS FROM FULL ASTERN . . .
LOOK OUT! FULL ASTERN! FIVE OF THEM!

THE DESTROYERS' SMOKE SCREEN SAVED THEM. THE BOMBERS GOT THEIR AIM TOO LATE . . . ONLY ONE TORPEDO STRUCK — A GLANCING BLOW — AND TWO OF THE BOMBERS WERE HIT BY ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE.
THEN, UNACCOUNTABLY, THE ATTACK WAS SUDDENLY BROKEN OFF.

IN FACT IT WAS THE RETURNING SWORDFISH THAT SAVED THE DAY...
BRITISH WARPLANES! BREAK FOR HOME, WARRIORS OF JAPAN! THEY WILL HAVE FIGHTER PROTECTION!
THE COMMANDER AND THE FIRST LIEUTENANT WENT THROUGH THE SHIP BELOW, INSPECTING THE RAVAGES OF THE ATTACK.
WELL, WHAT'S THE DAMAGE, NUMBER ONE?
WE'RE HOLED IN TWO PLACES, SIR, BUT THE BULKHEADS ARE HOLDING. ALL THE FIRES ARE UNDER CONTROL... I THINK WE CAN MAKE TRINCO AT REDUCED SPEED. WHAT ABOUT THE RETURNING AIRCRAFT?


CAPTAIN GLANVILLE AND WILLOWBY WATCHED THE SWORDFISH FLY DOWN THE SHIP LOOKING FOR THEIR SIGNAL.
WOULD YOU RATHER WE DITCHED THE AIRCRAFT, SIR?
WOW! THEY'RE IN A ROTTEN MESS! WE'VE MISSED A PACKET!
IT'S MY FAULT, WINGS, NOT THEIRS! IF YOUR MEN CAN LAND ON ALL THIS, WE'LL TAKE 'EM ABOARD. I CAN TRIM THE LIST A BIT.

BUOYED UP ON HER PORT SIDE BY EMPTIED TANKS AND WEIGHED DOWN ON THE STARBOARD SIDE BY A THOUSAND MEN LINING THE EDGES OF THE DECKS, THE *INSUPERABLE* RIGHTED HERSELF.
SORRY THEY'VE HAD TO COME BACK TO ALL THIS, WINGS.
IT'S DUE TO YOUR HANDLING OF THE SHIP, SIR, THAT THEY'RE LANDING AT ALL.

MICHAEL MET THE RETURNING PILOTS IN THE FORWARD PARKING AREA.
HULLO, WINGS, OLD CHAP! OUR OLD 'STRINGBAGS' SCARED 'EM OFF... WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT? WE'VE LOST ONE CREW THOUGH, I'M AFRAID — THE OLD MAN'S SON!
OH, NO!

WILLOWBY HAD LEARNED A NEW RESPECT FOR THE CAPTAIN. HE SAW HIM FOR WHAT HE REALLY WAS — A VERY ABLE AND COURAGEOUS SEA CAPTAIN.
I'M SORRY, SIR!
MY SON, YOU SAY...! THANK YOU, MICHAEL, IT WAS KIND OF YOU... I SEE NOW THAT YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT MANY THINGS.

Chapter 3. EVASIVE ACTION

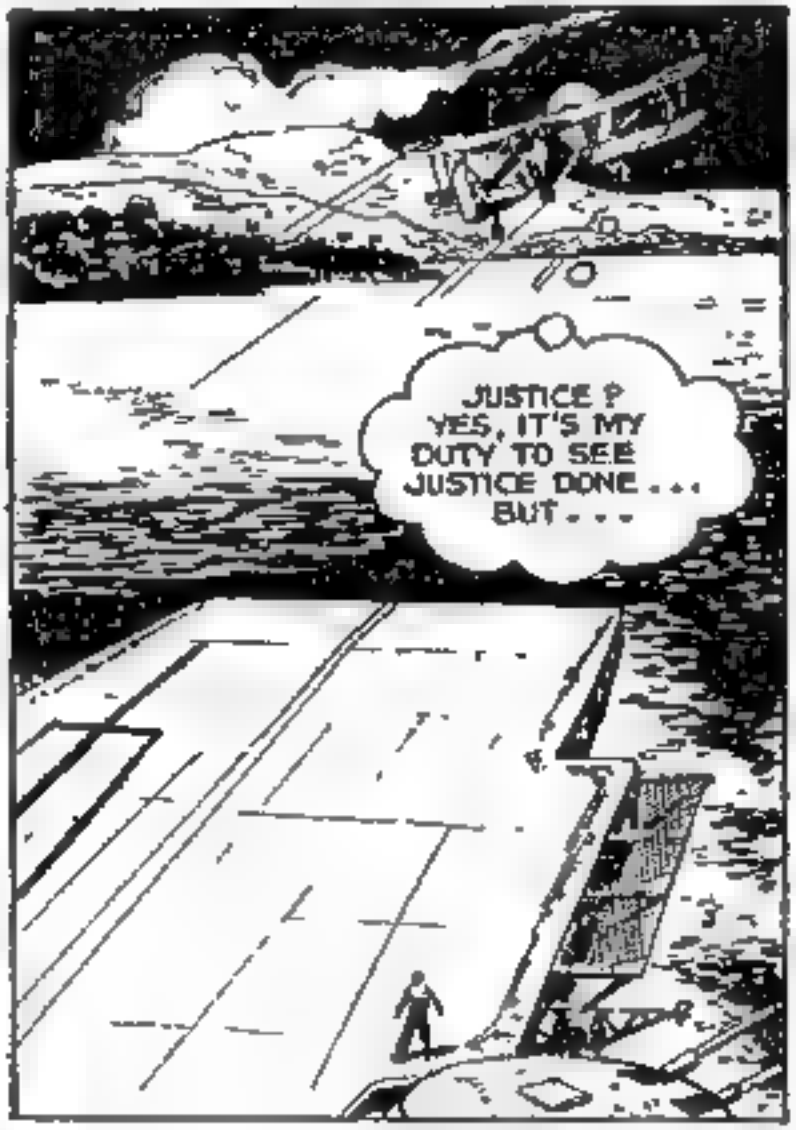
THE *INSUPERABLE* WAS BEING REPAIRED WITH ALL HASTE AND THE EXPERTS SAID SHE COULD BE SEAWORTHY AGAIN IN A FORTNIGHT. MICHAEL WILLOWBY TENTATIVELY APPROACHED THE CAPTAIN AS HE WATCHED THE WORK GOING ON.
I'M TO ATTEND AS A WITNESS AT A COURT OF INQUIRY, SIR.
YES, I KNOW, THANK YOU. YOU MUST STATE THE FACTS PERFECTLY TRUTHFULLY, COMMANDER. IT IS YOUR DUTY AS AN OFFICER.

AYE, AYE, SIR. I UNDERSTAND.
DOES HE, I WONDER? THE DECISION WILL TURN AGAINST ME- QUITE JUSTIFIABLY... THEN IT WILL MEAN *A COURT MARTIAL* FOR ME... AND THE COMPLETE RUIN OF MY CAREER!
CAPTAIN GLANVILLE HAD BEEN OBSTINATE, BUT HE DID NOT LACK COURAGE OR DIGNITY – IN THE FACE OF EITHER THE ENEMY OR HIS SUPERIORS – AND MICHAEL WAS BEGINNING TO REALISE IT.

THE COMPLETION OF THE CARRIER'S REPAIRS PASSED ALMOST WITHOUT NOTICE. OVERCAST AS IT WAS BY THE PERSONAL DRAMA THAT WAS IMPENDING. THE DAY FINALLY CAME...
NAVAL H.Q., COLOMBO, DRIVER! GOOD LUCK, SIR!
IT IS A STRANGE FEELING TO THINK I MAY NEVER BOARD MY SHIP AGAIN BY CAPTAIN'S PINNACE!

THE SHIP'S SQUADRONS WERE ASHORE ON TRINCOMALEE'S AIRSTRIP... FROM THERE, MICHAEL WILLOWBY WAS GOING TO FLY HIMSELF OVER TO THE COURT IN ONE OF THE SWORDFISH. THE AIR CREWS SAW HIM OFF WITH THEIR ENCOURAGEMENTS.
GOOD RIDDANCE TO THE OLD MAN! NOW'S YOUR CHANCE, WINGS... TELL THEM EVERYTHING AND DON'T PULL YOUR PUNCHES!
B

REMEMBER POOR OLD BERTIE BREWSTER — AND HIS OWN SON. THE MAN'S A DANGEROUS MENACE AND WE'VE A RIGHT TO HAVE JUSTICE!


JUSTICE? YES, IT'S MY DUTY TO SEE JUSTICE DONE... BUT...

AT THE COURT OF INQUIRY IN COLOMBO – NO TIME WAS WASTED.
THEIR LORDSHIPS, CAPTAIN GLANVILLE, TAKE A VERY GRAVE VIEW OF THIS MATTER; AND INSTRUCT US TO ASCERTAIN THE CAUSES AND THE BLAME. YOUR SHIP WAS SEVERELY DAMAGED AND VERY NEARLY LOST WHEN AT SEA WITHOUT FIGHTER COVER. I HOPE YOU WILL BE COMPLETELY FRANK WITH US – IT WILL SAVE US ALL A LOT OF TROUBLE.
YOU WILL HAVE MY UTMOST CO-OPERATION, GENTLEMEN ... I WILL HOLD NOTHING BACK.

THEN MICHAEL WILLOWBY WAS BROUGHT BEFORE THE COURT.
COMMANDER WILLOWBY, WE UNDERSTAND YOU ADVISED CAPTAIN GLANVILLE TO WAIT FOR HIS FIGHTER SQUADRONS BEFORE SETTING COURSE. AND NOT ONLY DID HE TAKE NO NOTICE, BUT YOU CONSIDER THAT HIS ACTION LED TO DISASTER.
NO, SIR! THAT IS QUITE INCORRECT!

EVERY HEAD IN THE COURT LOOKED UP IN SURPRISE.
WHATEVER I SAID AT THE TIME – I WAS WRONG! MAY I POINT OUT TO THEIR LORDSHIPS THAT THE CARRIER WAS NOT LOST! AND IT IS MY OPINION THAT IT WAS CAPTAIN GLANVILLE'S EXTRAORDINARY SEAMANSHIP, AND EXAMPLE UNDER FIRE, WHICH SAVED HER – AND MOST OF THE LIVES ON BOARD.
YES, YES, COMMANDER... THIS IS NOT QUITE THE POINT. CONSIDER CAPTAIN GLANVILLE'S DECISION IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I CONSIDER IN THE EVENT HE WAS JUSTIFIED! TIME WAS ALL IMPORTANT... IS IT NOT SO, SIR, THAT BY HIS PROMPTNESS HE CAUSED A JAPANESE CRUISER SQUADRON TO TURN TAIL? MOREOVER, I UNDERSTAND THAT OUR OWN FIGHTERS BEAT OFF AN ENEMY AIR ATTACK ON NAVAL H.Q. HERE.

CAPTAIN GLANVILLE WAS CLEARED – LARGELY DUE TO THE EVIDENCE OF HIS COMMANDER-IN-FLYING. AFTERWARDS, GRATEFUL YET PERPLEXED, THE CAPTAIN TOOK MICHAEL ASIDE . . .
DID YOU HONESTLY BELIEVE ALL THAT, MICHAEL? IF NOT, WHY DID YOU SAY IT?
I FOUND OUT HOW MUCH I HAD TO LEARN ABOUT SEAMANSHIP, SIR... BUT YOU TAUGHT ME SOMETHING ELSE...

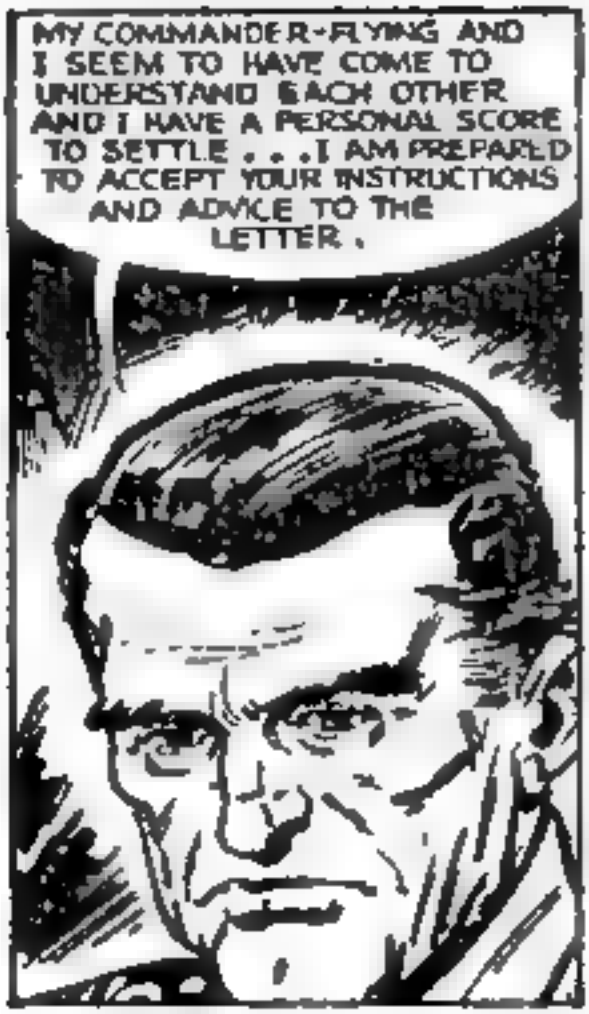
HOW EASILY AN AERIAL TORPEDO ATTACK CAN BE THWARTED BY A FINE CAPTAIN. I AM A BETTER COMMANDER FLYING FOR KNOWING THAT - AND I SHALL BE THANKFUL FOR THAT KNOWLEDGE SOME DAY ON A STRIKE OF OUR OWN!

SUDDENLY THERE CAME AN INTERRUPTION. A NAVAL DISPATCH RIDER HAD JUST DELIVERED A SIGNAL TO THE ADMIRAL OUTSIDE THE NAVAL H.Q. CLOSE BY.
WHAT UNEXPECTED NEWS! GENTLEMEN! WE MUST CONFER AT ONCE! CAPTAIN GLANVILLE AND COMMANDER WILLOWBY — IT CONCERNS YOU...

IN A FEW MINUTES, THE COURT ROOM WAS TRANSFERRED INTO A SCENE OF URGENT CONFERENCE...
GENTLEMEN! I HAVE JUST RECEIVED A WIRELESS SIGNAL FROM THE R.A.F. OUTPOST AT KRUMZI ATOLL. THE JAP FLEET HAS PUT BACK TO REFUEL AT NIAS OFF SUMATRA, AND WITH THE *INSUPERABLE* APPARENTLY OUT OF ACTION, THEY BELIEVE NOTHING ELSE CAN INTERFERE WITH THEM. THEY'LL BE THERE FOR THIRTY-SIX HOURS.

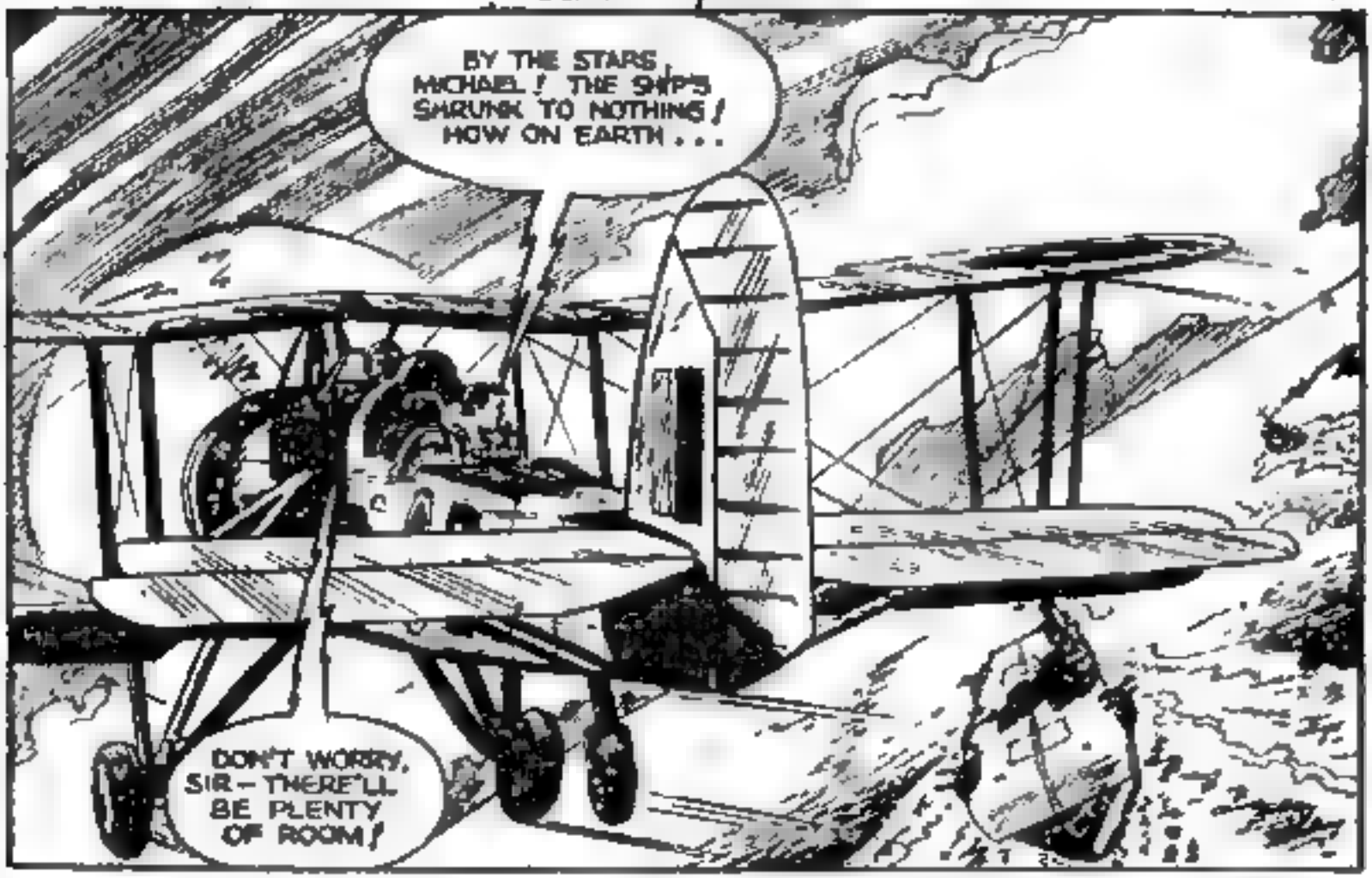
THE RECENT INCIDENT WOULD SEEM TO HAVE TURNED TO OUR ADVANTAGE. WE'VE BEEN GRANTED AN OUTSIDE CHANCE OF CATCHING THEM UNAWARES. WILLOWBY, COULD YOUR SWORDFISH DO IT?
A SURPRISE ATTACK—LOW IN OFF THE SEA! YES, I THINK SO, SIR!

BUT, DESPITE THE RESULT OF THE INQUIRY, SOME DOUBT STILL LAY OVER CAPTAIN GLANVILLE'S THEORIES. AND ALL HEADS TURNED TOWARDS HIM, AS THE ADMIRAL CONTINUED.
BUT THERE IS JUST ONE THING... CAPTAIN GLANVILLE! YOU HAVE MADE IT CLEAR IN THE PAST THAT YOU PREFER BATTLESHIPS TO CARRIERS ... IF YOU WOULD WISH SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE OVER YOUR SHIP...
AM I TO UNDERSTAND, SIR, THAT I AM DEFINITELY RELIEVED OF MY COMMAND?
NO, THAT IS NOT AT ALL SO, CAPTAIN— BUT...


MY COMMANDER-FLYING AND I SEEM TO HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AND I HAVE A PERSONAL SCORE TO SETTLE . . . I AM PREPARED TO ACCEPT YOUR INSTRUCTIONS AND ADVICE TO THE LETTER .

I'M GLAD! ANY PARTICULAR QUESTIONS WHILE WE WAIT FOR THE CHARTS ?
YES, SIR! CAN YOU TELL ME ANYTHING MORE ABOUT THIS KRUMZI ATOLL?
MICHAEL WAS SLIGHTLY PUZZLED . THE ATOLL DID NOT SEEM VERY IMPORTANT . . . BUT THIS WAS SOMETHING ELSE HE WAS TO LEARN IN TIME .

IT WAS AN HOUR BEFORE THE CONFERENCE BROKE UP .
YOU'LL BE RETURNING TO TRINCO BY ROAD . . . I'LL SEE YOU ABOARD, SIR .
NO, MICHAEL . . . EVERY HOUR IS PRECIOUS! I'VE ALREADY HAD THE SHIP SIGNALLED TO SAIL – AND THE SQUADRONS TO STAND BY . YOU'LL DO ME THE HONOUR TO FLY ME ABOARD AT SEA . . .
MICHAEL WAS SURPRISED AND OVERJOYED – IT WOULD BE THE FIRST TIME THE CAPTAIN HAD EVER FLOWN .


BY THE STARS, MICHAEL! THE SHIP'S SHRUNK TO NOTHING! HOW ON EARTH . . .
DON'T WORRY, SIR – THERE'LL BE PLENTY OF ROOM!

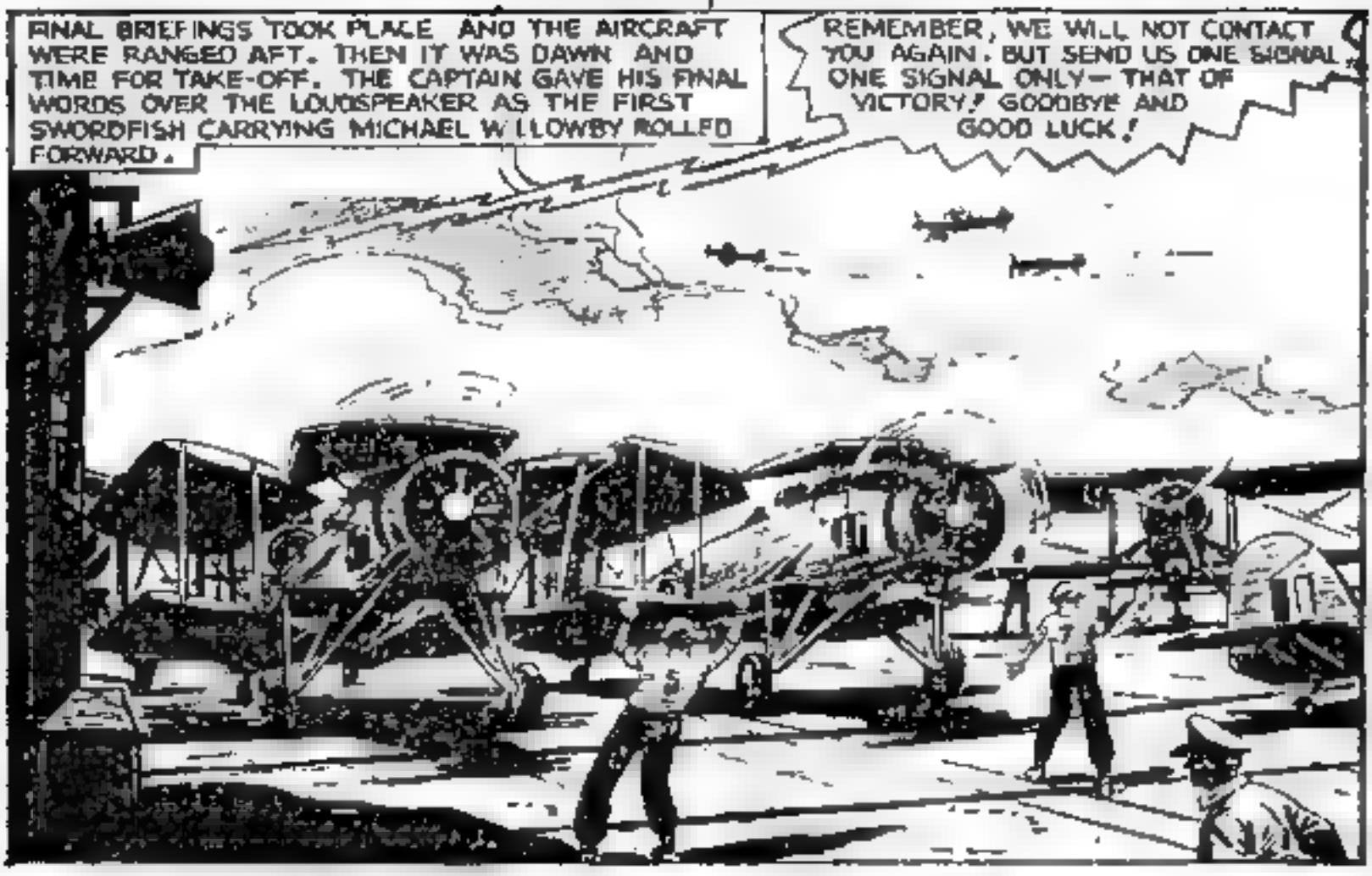
SO THE CAPTAIN'S PREMONITION HAD BEEN RIGHT, BUT NOT THE WAY HE HAD EXPECTED. HE NEVER AGAIN RETURNED TO HIS SHIP THE OLD WAY.
YOU KNOW, I ENJOYED THAT. THANK YOU, WINGS. I NOW KNOW WHAT YOU CHAPS GO THROUGH EVERY TIME!
LUMME! NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE OLD MAN AIRBORNE!

WELL OUT AT SEA, WITH ALL THE SQUADRONS ABOARD, THE CAPTAIN AND HIS COMMANDER-FLYING HELD A GENERAL BRIEFING IN THE WARDROOM.
GENTLEMEN, THIS IS OUR FIRST OPERATIONAL STRIKE. I WILL NOT FAIL YOU — AND I KNOW YOU WILL NOT FAIL THE SHIP! THE FIGHTER SQUADRONS WILL COVER THE TORPEDO STRIKE AND — LISTEN CAREFULLY — AFTER THE STRIKE — NONE OF YOU WILL RETURN TO THE SHIP! INSTEAD, YOU WILL FLY ACROSS TO KRUNZI ATOLL!

WILLOWBY LOOKED AT HIS CAPTAIN WITH CONCERN . . .
BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SHIP, SIR? THE JAPS ARE BOUND TO SEND OUT A COUNTER STRIKE AGAINST HER AFTERWARDS.
THE SHIP, MICHAEL? WE'LL LOOK AFTER OURSELVES AS WE DID BEFORE. YOU SEE, IT'S IN BOTH OUR INTERESTS THAT YOU DON'T RETURN. WE'LL BE DODGING ABOUT IN THE HOPES THAT THEY WON'T FIND US AND IF WE GAVE YOU A HOMING POSITION THE JAPS WOULD BE DOWN ON US — AND WE'D ALL CATCH A PACKET!

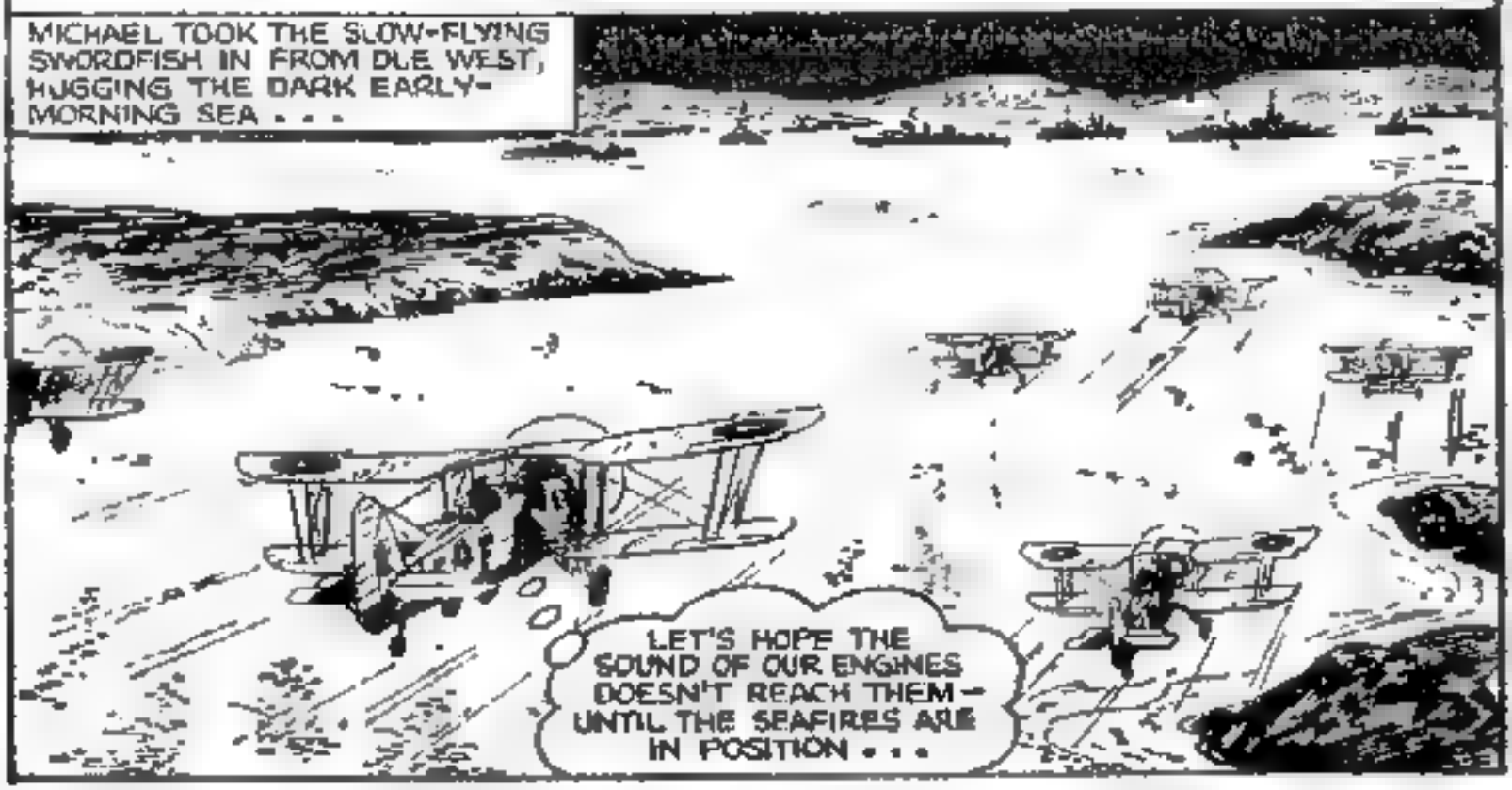
THE CAPTAIN WENT ON TO EXPLAIN MORE ABOUT THE ATOLL.
IT'S THE LAST R.A.F. OUTPOST — A REFUELLING STATION. NOT MUCH OF A PLACE. A ROUGH AIRSTRIP KEPT, I GATHER, BY AN OFFICER AND A FEW AIRMEN ... BUT I'VE ARRANGED THAT AFTER REFUELLING, YOU'LL BE PICKED UP LATER BY AN AMERICAN CARRIER TASK FORCE STEAMING UP FROM AUSTRALIA. THAT'S ALL UNTIL FINAL BRIEFING IN THE READY ROOMS BEFORE FLY-OFF.

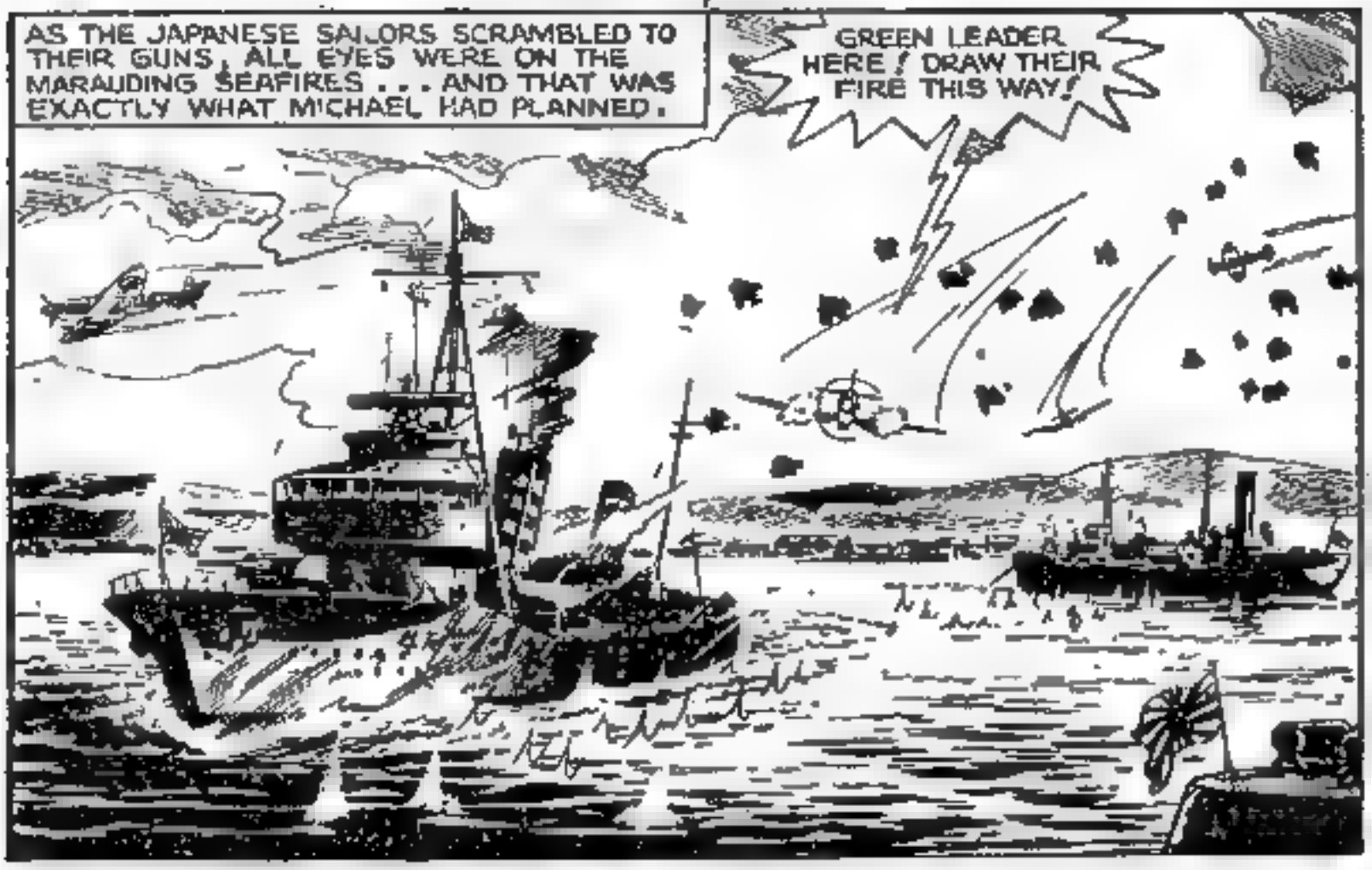
AFTER THE BRIEFING ...
YOU'RE RISKING THE SHIP AND YOUR REPUTATION AGAIN, S R — THIS TIME FOR THE SAKE OF THE SQUADRONS! I'D LIKE TO REMAIN ABOARD.
NO, MICHAEL! THE STRIKE COMES FIRST — AND WILL NEED YOUR PERSONAL DIRECTION. ANYWAY, YOU'RE GOING TO IMPROVE ON THE JAPANESE TACTICS — REMEMBER? NOW, THAT'S AN ORDER, SO OFF WITH YOU!

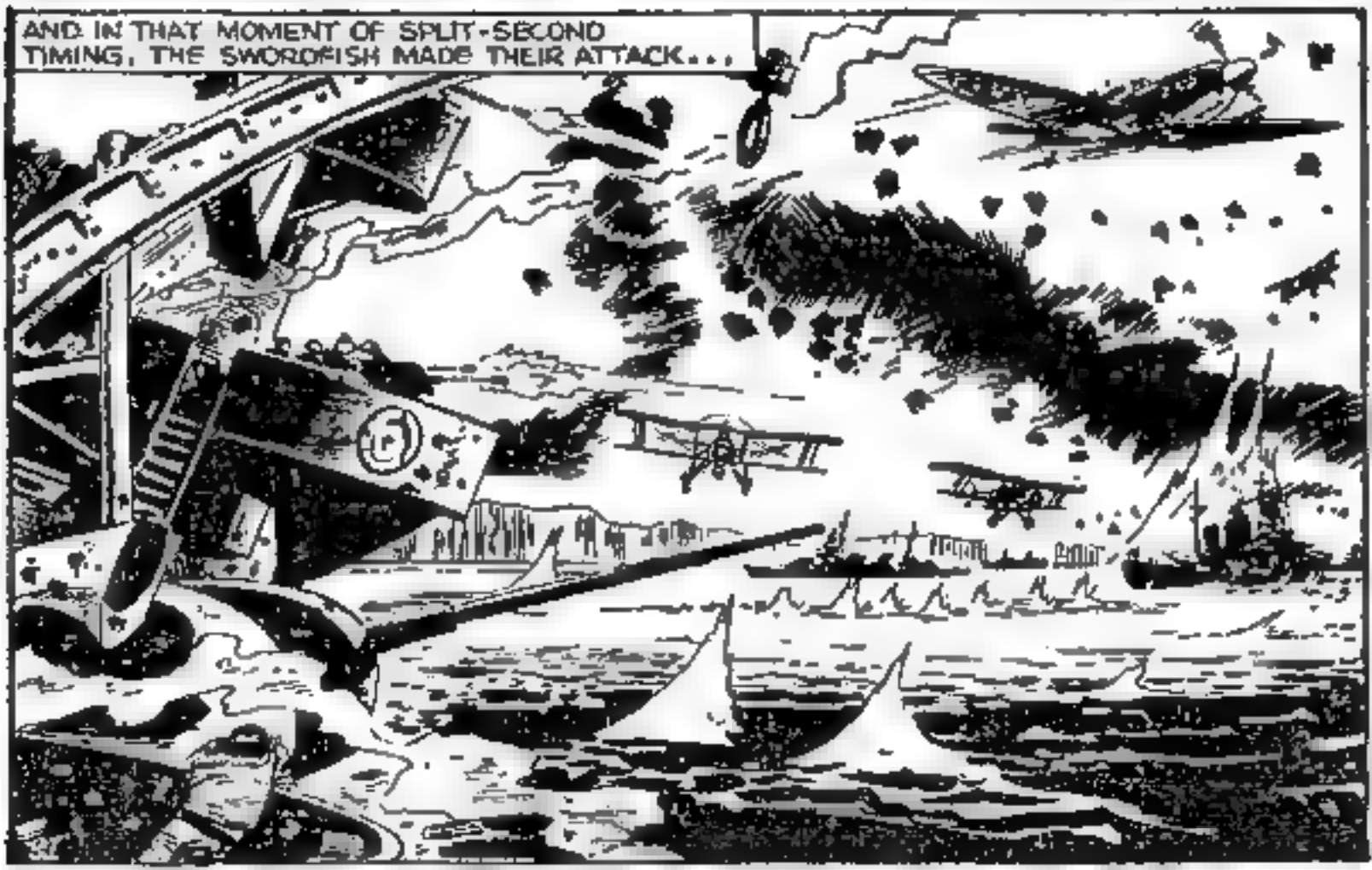

FINAL BRIEFINGS TOOK PLACE AND THE AIRCRAFT WERE RANGED AFT. THEN IT WAS DAWN AND TIME FOR TAKE-OFF. THE CAPTAIN GAVE HIS FINAL WORDS OVER THE LOUDSPEAKER AS THE FIRST SWORDFISH CARRYING MICHAEL WILLOWBY ROLLED FORWARD.
REMEMBER, WE WILL NOT CONTACT YOU AGAIN. BUT SEND US ONE SIGNAL, ONE SIGNAL ONLY — THAT OF VICTORY! GOODBYE AND GOOD LUCK!

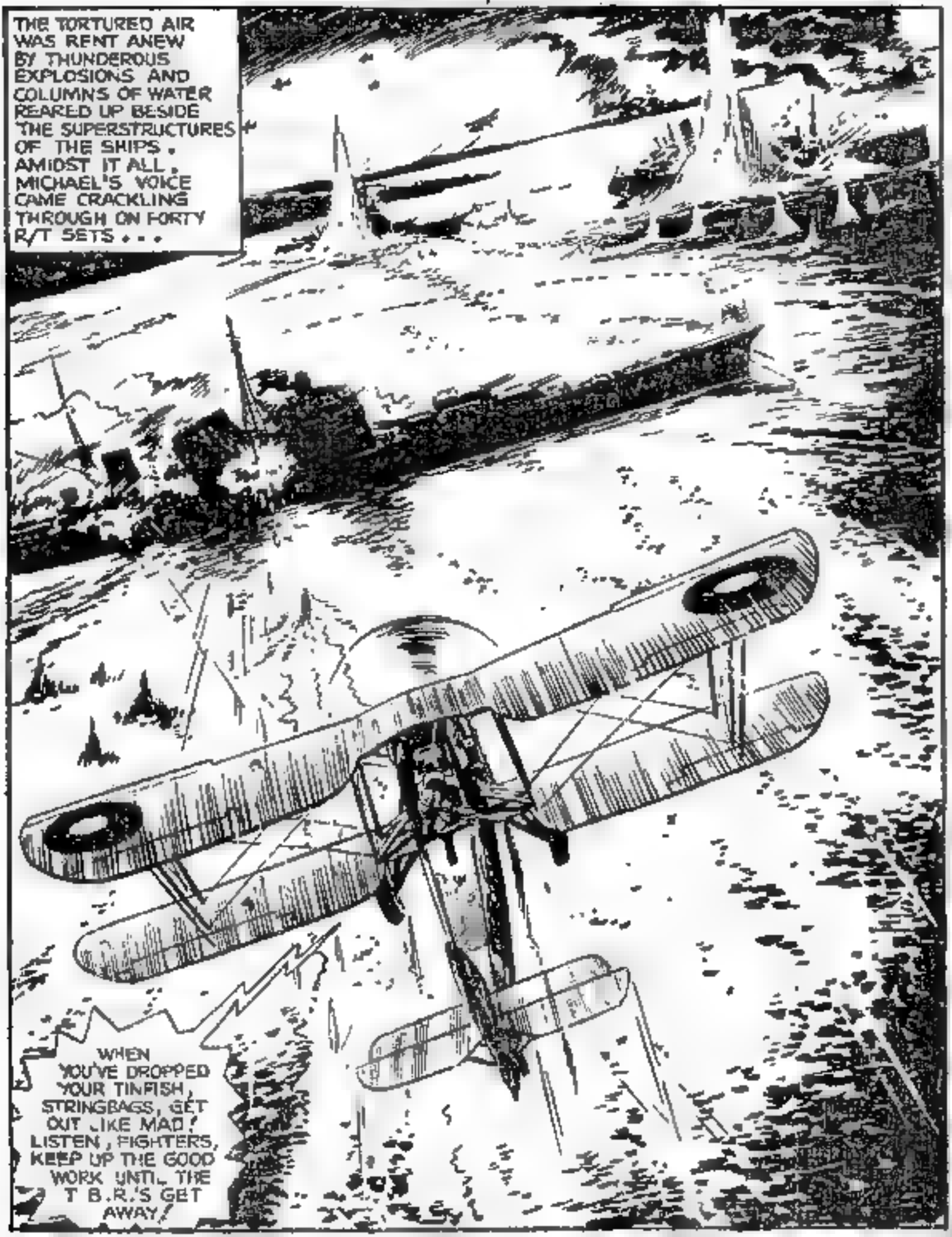
FROM THE WING-BRIDGE CAPTAIN GLANVILLE WATCHED THE PLANES DISAPPEAR TOWARDS THE RISING SUN. THE SHIP SEEMED STRANGELY EMPTY AND VULNERABLE WITHOUT THEM.
FIGHTERS AND TORPEDO-BOMBERS AIRBORNE, SIR!
THANK YOU, NUMBER ONE. ALTER COURSE — ONE-TWO-EIGHT!

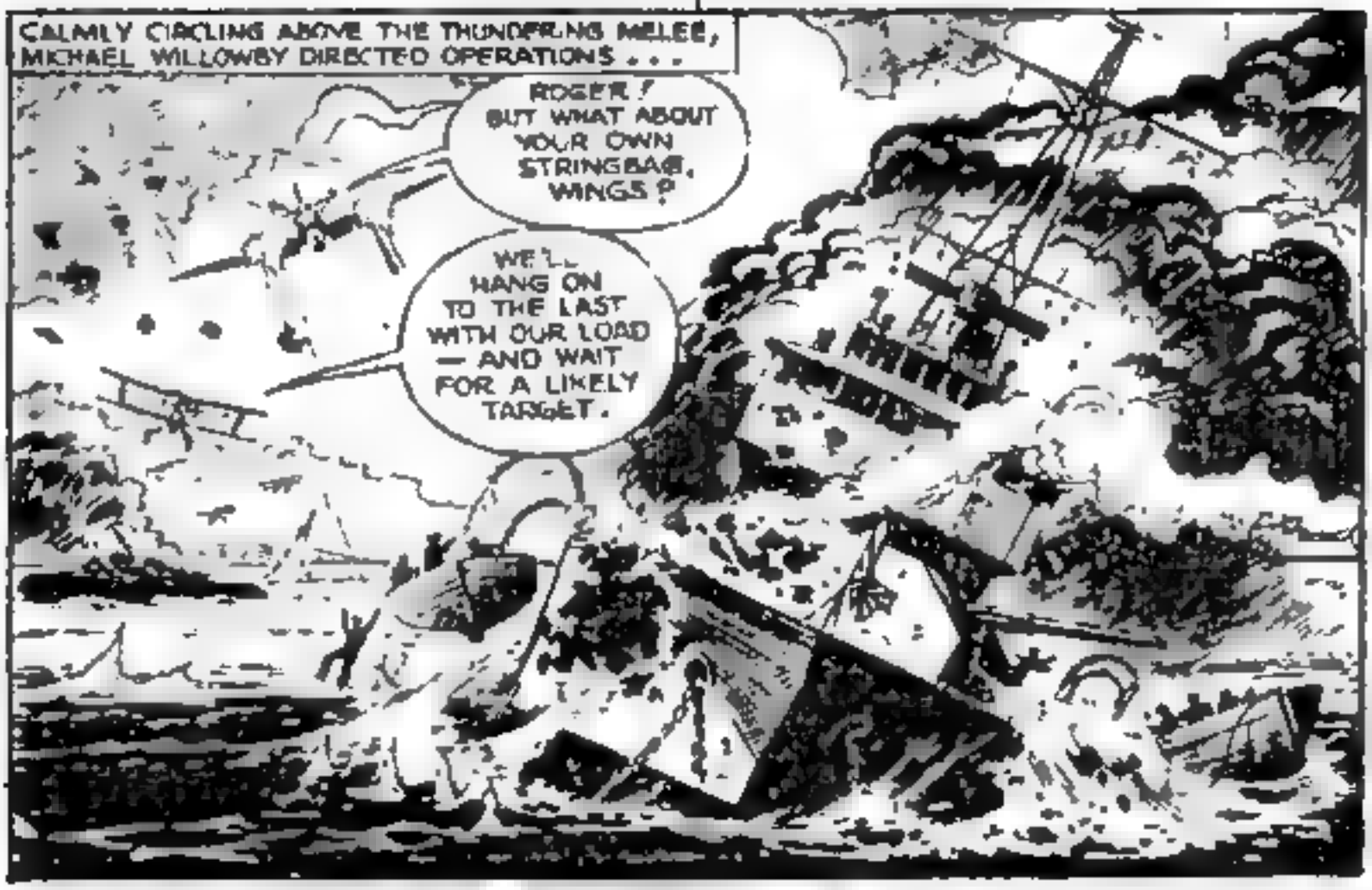
Chapter 4 VITAL EVIDENCE




AS THE JAPANESE SAILORS SCRAMBLED TO THEIR GUNS, ALL EYES WERE ON THE MARAUDING SEAFIRES . . . AND THAT WAS EXACTLY WHAT MICHAEL HAD PLANNED.
GREEN LEADER HERE! DRAW THEIR FIRE THIS WAY!

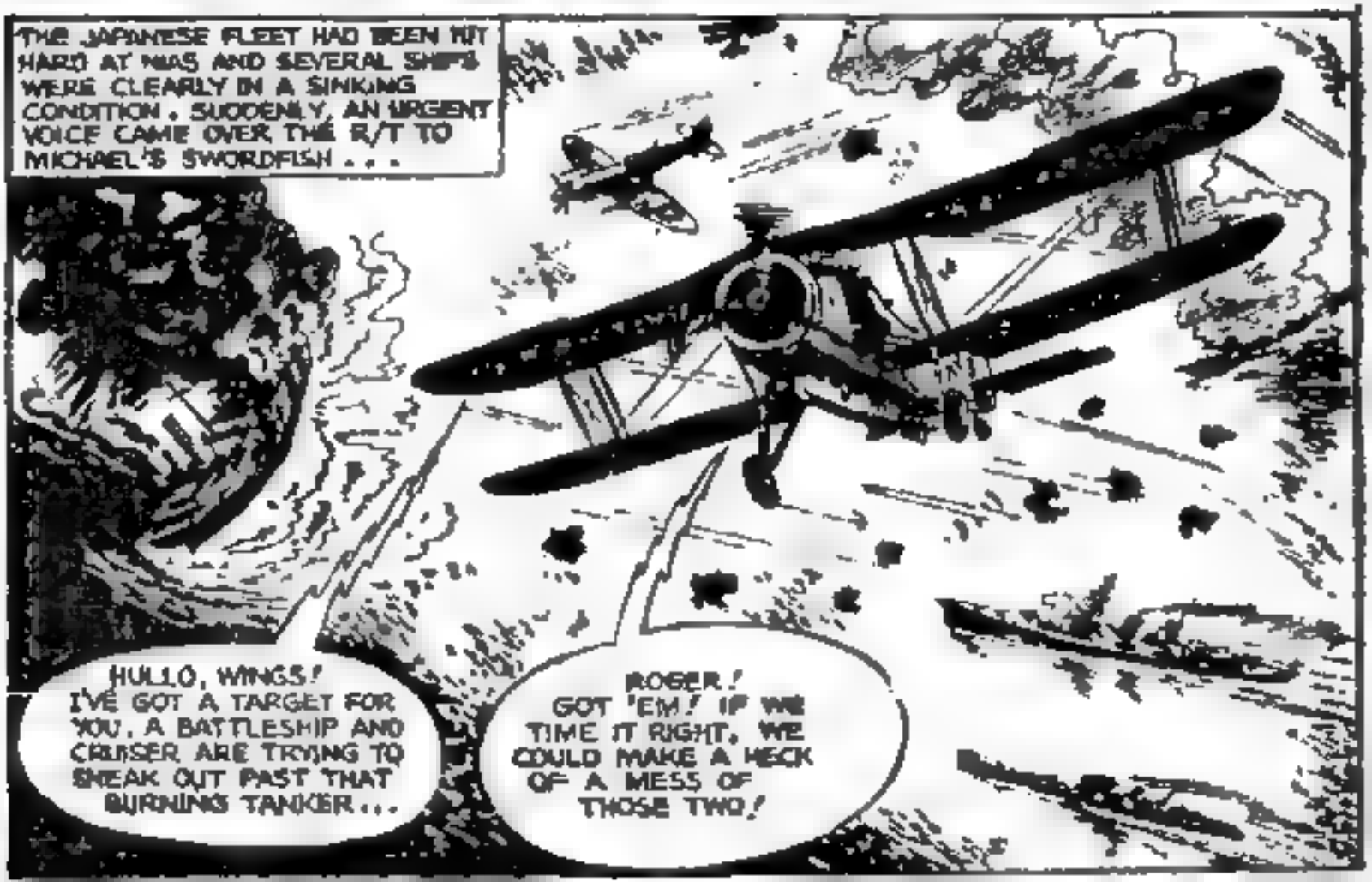

AND IN THAT MOMENT OF SPLIT-SECOND TIMING, THE SWORDFISH MADE THEIR ATTACK...


THE TORTURED AIR WAS RENT ANEW BY THUNDEROUS EXPLOSIONS AND COLUMNS OF WATER REARED UP BESIDE THE SUPERSTRUCTURES OF THE SHIPS. AMIDST IT ALL, MICHAEL'S VOICE CAME CRACKLING THROUGH ON FORTY R/T SETS...
WHEN YOU'VE DROPPED YOUR TINFISH, STRINGBAGS, GET OUT LIKE MAD! LISTEN, FIGHTERS, KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK UNTIL THE T.B.R.'S GET AWAY!


CALMLY CIRCLING ABOVE THE THUNDERING MELEE, MICHAEL WILLOWBY DIRECTED OPERATIONS . . .
ROGER! BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR OWN STRINGBAG, WINGS?
WE'LL HANG ON TO THE LAST WITH OUR LOAD — AND WAIT FOR A LIKELY TARGET.

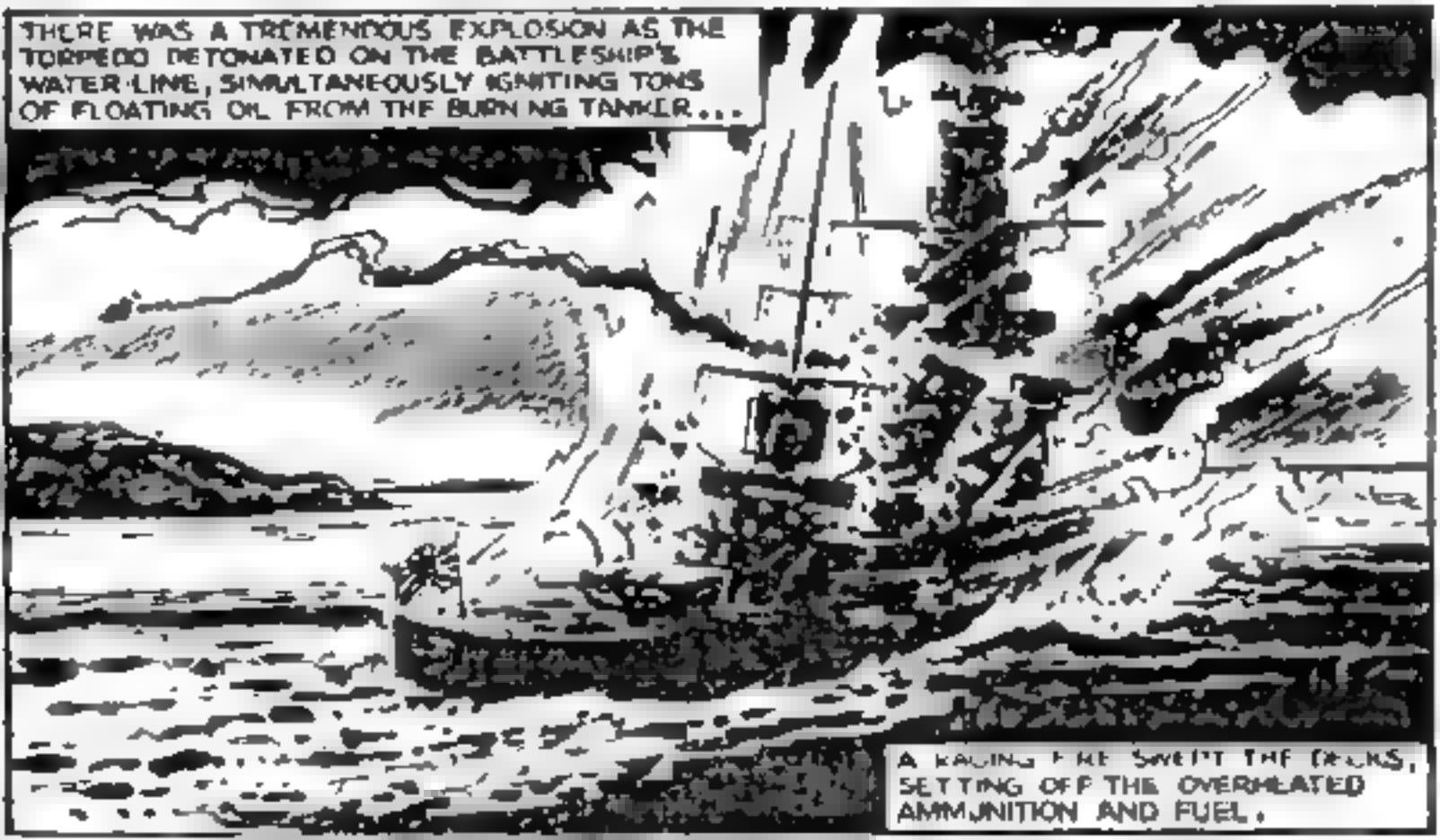
MEANWHILE, BACK ON THE *INSUPERABLE*, A LOOK OUT HAD SIGHTED A RUBBER DINGHY WITH THREE FIGURES IN IT. THE OCCUPANTS WERE PICKED UP...
TALK ABOUT BACK FROM THE DEAD! WAIT TILL WE TELL THE OLD MAN!
CAREFUL WITH 'EM! THEY'RE VERY WEAK!

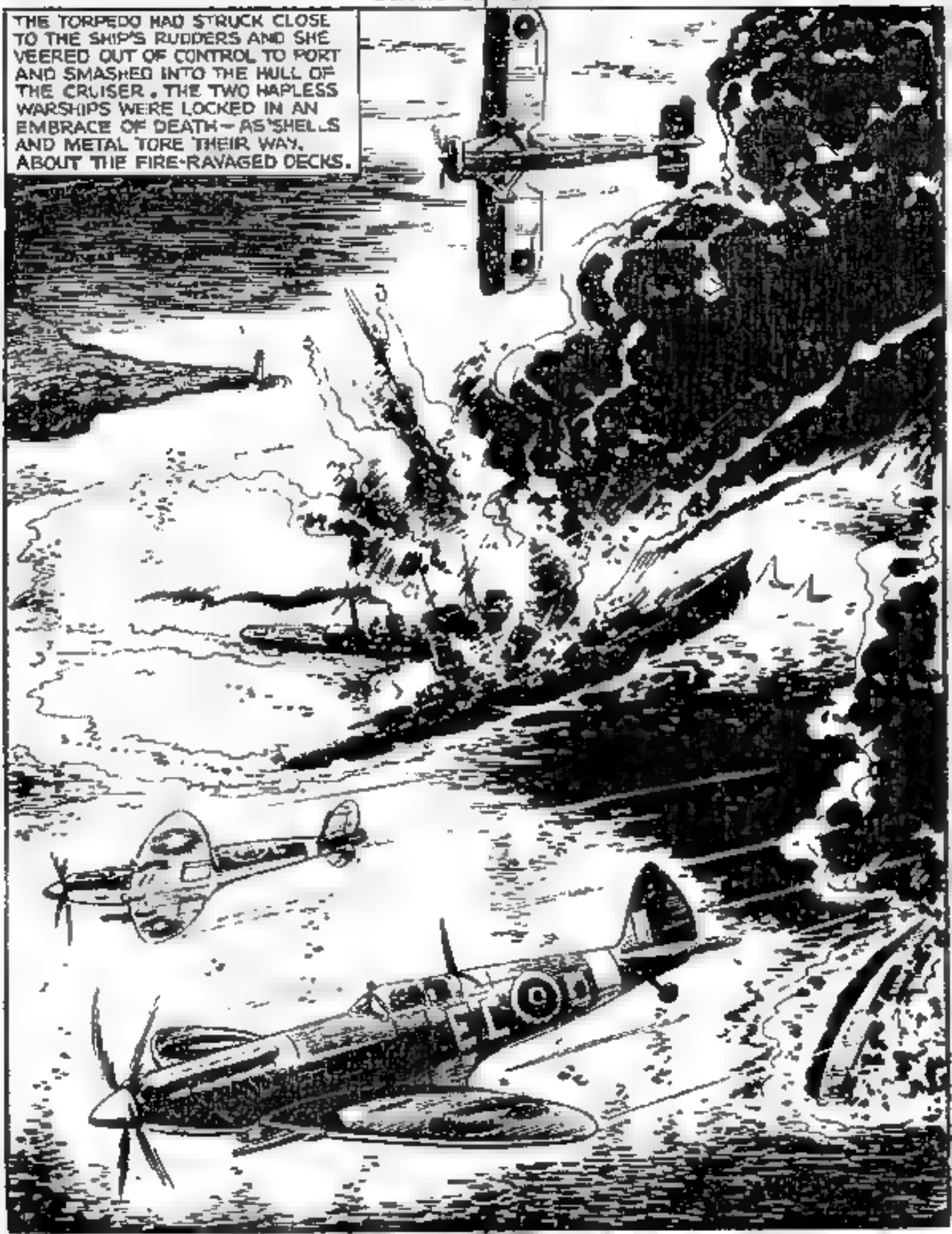
IT WAS CAPTAIN GLANVILLE'S SON AND HIS CREW, SUNBURNED AND EMACIATED, BUT OTHERWISE IN GOOD HEALTH. THEY WERE BROUGHT BEFORE AN OVERJOYED CAPTAIN.
DICK! MY BOY... AND YOU OTHER TWO!
HULLO FATHER... SIR! GOOD TO BE HOME!
AYE, SIR! IT'S A GOOD OMEN! THE STRIKE SHOULD JUST ABOUT BE GOING IN NOW... I'LL HAVE FIGHTER-CONTROL RELAYED TO THE BRIDGE.


THE JAPANESE FLEET HAD BEEN HIT HARD AT MAS AND SEVERAL SHIPS WERE CLEARLY IN A SINKING CONDITION. SUDDENLY, AN URGENT VOICE CAME OVER THE R/T TO MICHAEL'S SWORDFISH...
HULLO, WINGS! I'VE GOT A TARGET FOR YOU. A BATTLESHIP AND CRUISER ARE TRYING TO SNEAK OUT PAST THAT BURNING TANKER...
ROGER! GOT 'EM! IF WE TIME IT RIGHT, WE COULD MAKE A HECK OF A MESS OF THOSE TWO!

BOTH SHIPS! FULL AHEAD FOR THE GAP! BUT LET US NOT COLLIDE!
THE TWO WARSHIPS WERE DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO EACH OTHER AS THEY PLOUGHED SIDE BY SIDE BETWEEN THE TANKER AND THE COAST. PANIC BEGAN TO OVERTAKE THE JAPANESE AS THEY SAW THE FLIMSY AEROPLANE GROW BIGGER AND BIGGER IN THEIR SIGHTS — AND STILL FLY ON.
GET RIGHT DOWN ON THE WATER, PILOT... AND HOLD IT! NEARER STILL!
BY SHINTO! WE'LL BE HITTING THE BATTLESHIP!

THE GREAT MASS OF THE BATTLESHIP WAS LOOMING BEFORE THE SWORDFISH — AND STILL MICHAEL HELD OFF THE RELEASE BUTTON.
AIM FOR THE PORT RUDDER! HOLD IT — HOLD IT! TORPEDO GONE!


THERE WAS A TREMENDOUS EXPLOSION AS THE TORPEDO DETONATED ON THE BATTLESHIP'S WATER-LINE, SIMULTANEOUSLY IGNITING TONS OF FLOATING OIL FROM THE BURNING TANKER...
A RAGING FIRE SWEPT THE DECKS, SETTING OFF THE OVERHEATED AMMUNITION AND FUEL.


THE TORPEDO HAD STRUCK CLOSE TO THE SHIP'S RUDDERS AND SHE VEERED OUT OF CONTROL TO PORT AND SMASHED INTO THE HULL OF THE CRUISER. THE TWO HAPLESS WARSHIPS WERE LOCKED IN AN EMBRACE OF DEATH — AS SHELLS AND METAL TORE THEIR WAY ABOUT THE FIRE-RAVAGED DECKS.

THAT'LL KEEP THE JAP FLEET QUIET FOR A WHILE! FIGHTER SQUADRONS! YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO NOW!
ROGER! UNDERSTOOD!
THE FIGHTERS WERE TO MAKE OFF OPENLY NORTH-EAST FOR TWENTY MILES... AND THEN TO DOUBLE BACK AT SEA-LEVEL TO PICK UP THE SLOWER SWORDFISH HEADING FOR THE ATOLL.

ON THE COMPASS PLATFORM OF THE INSUPERABLE, MICHAEL'S VOICE SUDDENLY CAME THROUGH LOUD AND CLEAR...
MICHAEL CALLING CONTROL! VICTORY IS NOT A NAME STRONG ENOUGH [redacted] SUCH A SCENE. OUT!
BY THE STARS! NELSON ONCE SAID THAT! I WAS WRONG ABOUT THEM — THEY ARE SAILORS!
CAPTAIN GLANVILLE HAD KEPT THE TRADITION OF HIS ANCESTORS. HE HAD WON A GREAT NAVAL VICTORY— BUT NOT IN A WAY HE HAD EVER IMAGINED.

Chapter 5. SUICIDE ATTACKS

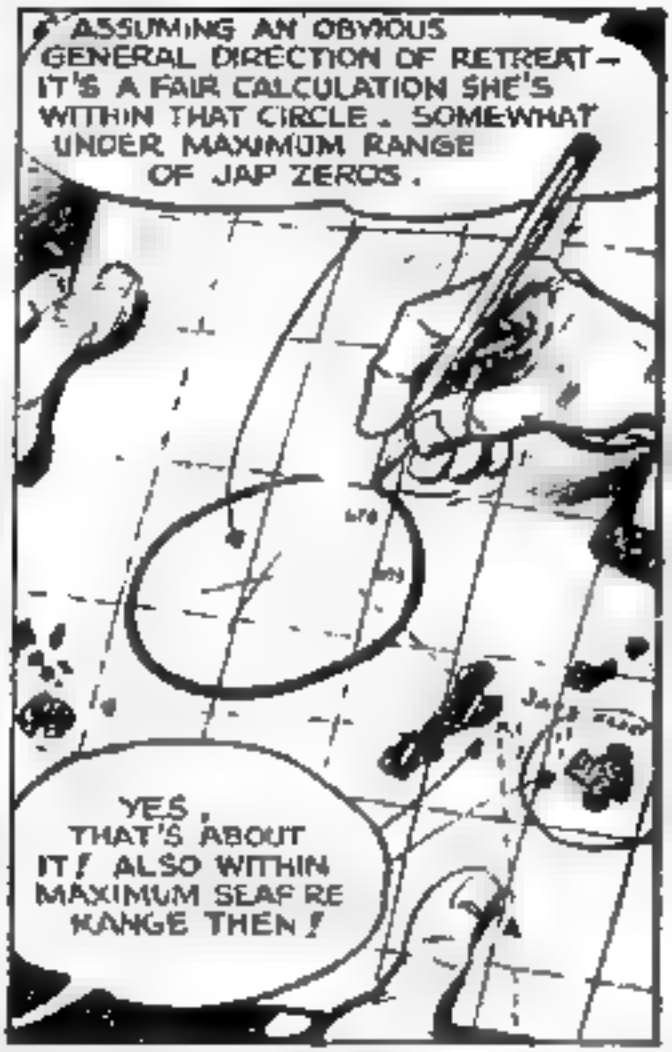
MICHAEL WILLOWBY STRIPPED OFF HIS HELMET AND GOGGLES REVEALING HIS FACE — AND THEIR BEARDED HOST SUDDENLY STARED AT H M IN AMAZEMENT.
MICHAEL! IT'S YOU!
FOR PETE'S SAKE! IT COULDN'T BE! BEHIND ALL THAT BEARD — BERTIE BREWSTER!

IT WAS A HAPPY REUNION INDEED. THEY, OF COURSE TOLD BERTIE EVERYTHING, NOT FORGETTING THE CAPTAIN'S NEW ROLE IN IT ALL. THEN THEY IN TURN WANTED TO KNOW ALL ABOUT THE OUTCAST.
FUNNILY ENOUGH, YOU KNOW, I ONCE LIVED IN JAPAN AND I SPEAK JAPANESE. THAT'S ONE REASON WHY THEY DUMPED ME HERE. QUIET NOW... WE MAY PICK UP NEWS OF WHETHER THEY'RE AFTER THE SHIP OR NOT!
IT WAS A SOBERING THOUGHT. THEY BECAME SILENT AND CROWDED ROUND THE WIRELESS SET.

THE JAPANESE ADMIRAL IN NIAS HAD CALLED FOR VOLUNTEER NAVAL PILOTS TO SEEK OUT AND DESTROY THE ENGLISH SHIP
YOU ALONE WILL HAVE THE HONOUR TO REVENGE OUR DISGRACE. SEARCH TILL YOU FIND THE ENEMY SHIP. YOU WILL NOT NEED PETROL FOR RETURNING.
WE SHALL NOT MISS! WE WILL FLY OUR WORTHLESS BODIES RIGHT INTO THE ACCURSED SHIP! BANZAI!

FIVE ZERO FIGHTERS WERE LOADED UP WITH A HEAVY BOMB EACH... AND FIVE DEDICATED PILOTS TOOK THEIR CEREMONIAL FAREWELL.
WE WILL BE KAMIKAZE, HONORABLE SIR. WE WILL NOT RETURN. MAY WE TAKE HUMBLE LEAVE NOW? THE ENGLISH CARRIER
MAY THE SPIRITS OF YOUR ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS BE WITH YOU. TIME IS SHORT. GO NOW!

BERTIE HEARD THE SIGNAL FOR SUICIDE VOLUNTEERS - IT WAS A GRIM PROSPECT FOR THEIR OLD SHIP. MICHAEL TOOK THE SENIOR SWORDFISH OBSERVER ASIDE . . .
HOW FAR AWAY WILL THE SUPER BE NOW, DO YOU THINK?
DIFFICULT TO SAY, WINGS. SHE'LL BE ALTERING COURSE ALL OVER THE PLACE, NO DOUBT. LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT OUR CHARTS!


ASSUMING AN OBVIOUS GENERAL DIRECTION OF RETREAT— IT'S A FAIR CALCULATION SHE'S WITHIN THAT CIRCLE. SOMEWHAT UNDER MAXIMUM RANGE OF JAP ZEROS.
YES, THAT'S ABOUT IT! ALSO WITHIN MAXIMUM SEAFIRE RANGE THEN!

MICHAEL RETURNED TO THE OTHERS, A LOOK OF GRIM DETERMINATION ON HIS FACE.
ABOUT THE SHIP . . . WHATEVER HE DID BEFORE, THE CAPTAIN HAS NOW RISKED HER TO ENSURE OUR SURVIVAL. SHE'S IN GRAVE DANGER AND NEEDS HELP. I PROPOSE TO FLY A SEAFIRE AFTER HER. BUT NO ONE NEED COME WHO DOESN'T WANT TO.
WE'RE WITH YOU, WINGS!
YOU'RE NOT LEAVING US BEHIND!

MICHAEL FOUND DIFFICULTY IN TELLING ONE OF THEM—ONE WHO HAD BEEN SLIGHTLY WOUNDED—TO HAND HIS PLANE OVER TO HIM.
WE SHAN'T BE ABLE TO RISK A WORD OVER THE R/T, AND I WARN YOU THAT WE MAY POSSIBLY NEVER FIND THE SUPER BEFORE OUR PETROL RUNS OUT.
WE KNOW THE ODDS, WINGS! BUT WE'LL FIND HER SOMEHOW..

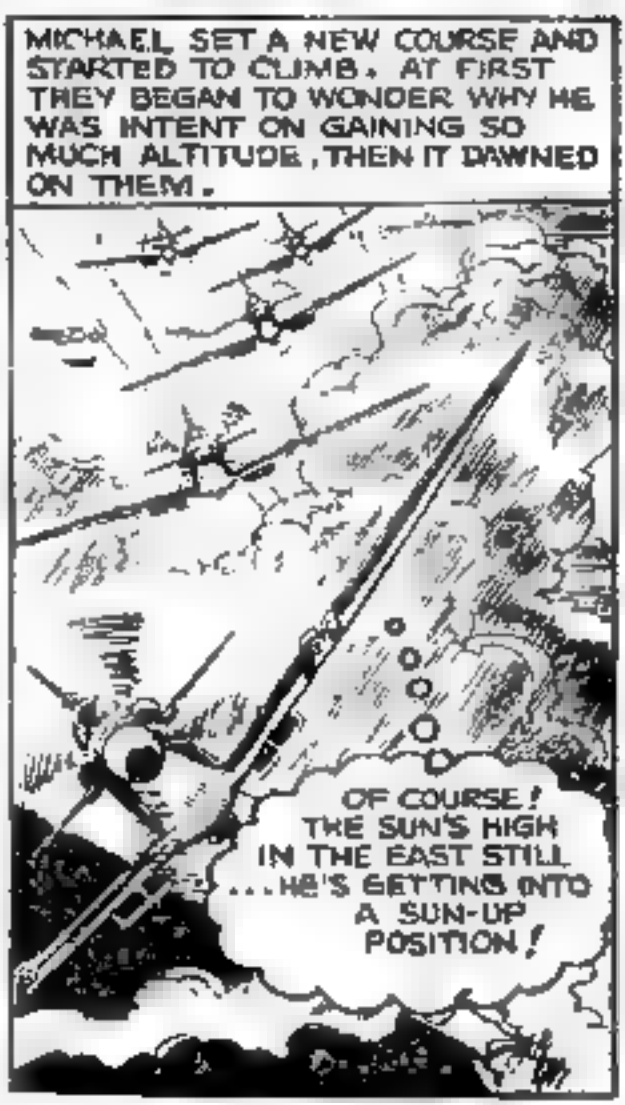
THE SEAFIRES WERE REFUELLED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, AND IN A SHORT TIME, THE FIRST OF THEM WAS CLIMBING INTO THE SKY. MICHAEL TOOK OFF LAST.
CHEERIO, SIR! GIVE MY LOVE TO THE SHIP.
AND YOU BET I'LL TELL THE OLD MAN ABOUT YOU. BE SEEING YOU, BERTIE, AND GOOD LUCK!

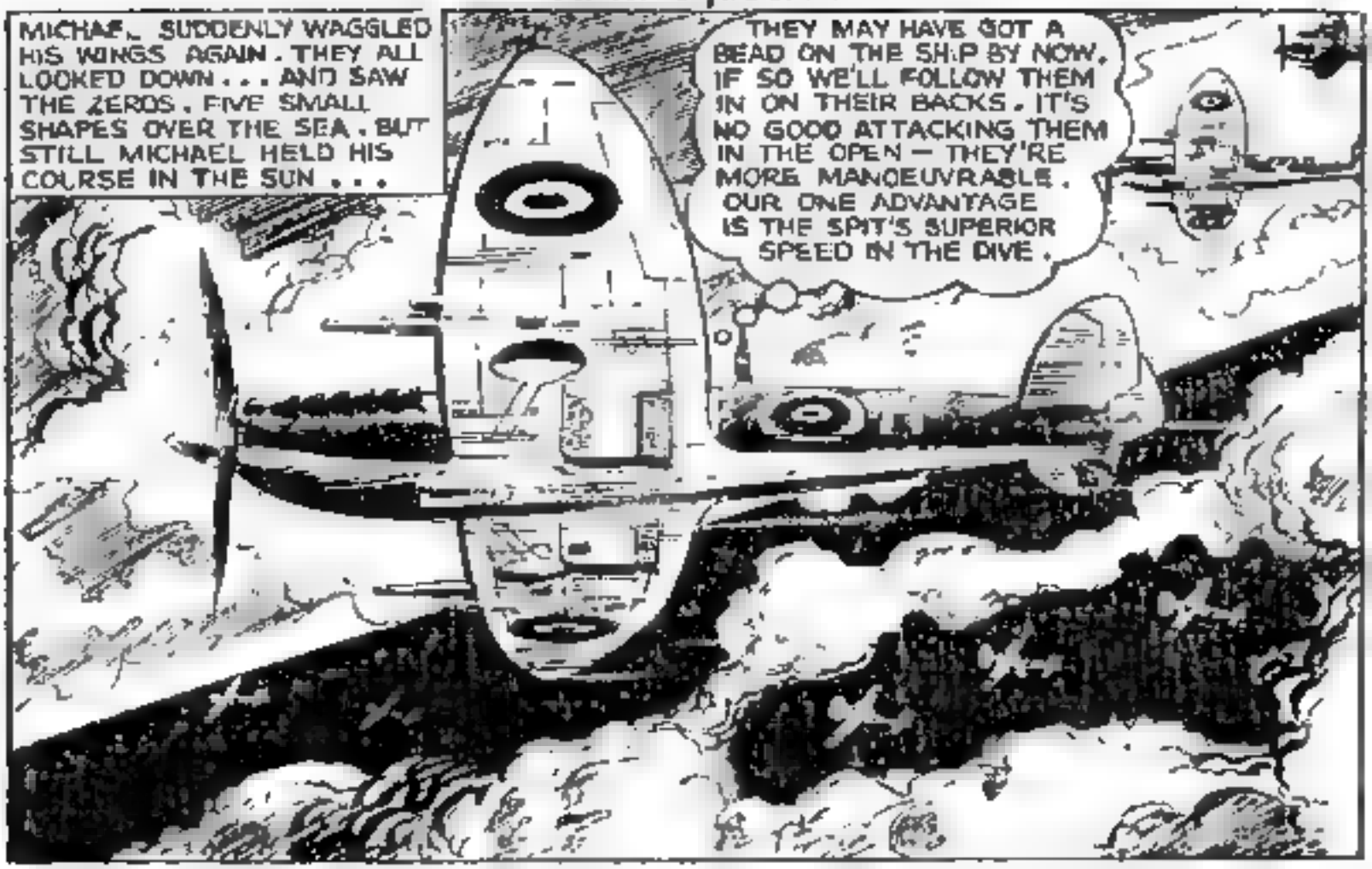
ABOUT SEVENTY MINUTES LATER, THE SEAFIRES WERE FLYING WITHIN THE ESTIMATED CIRCLE.
NOT A DARNED THING IN SIGHT AND ONLY TWENTY MINUTES FUEL LEFT.

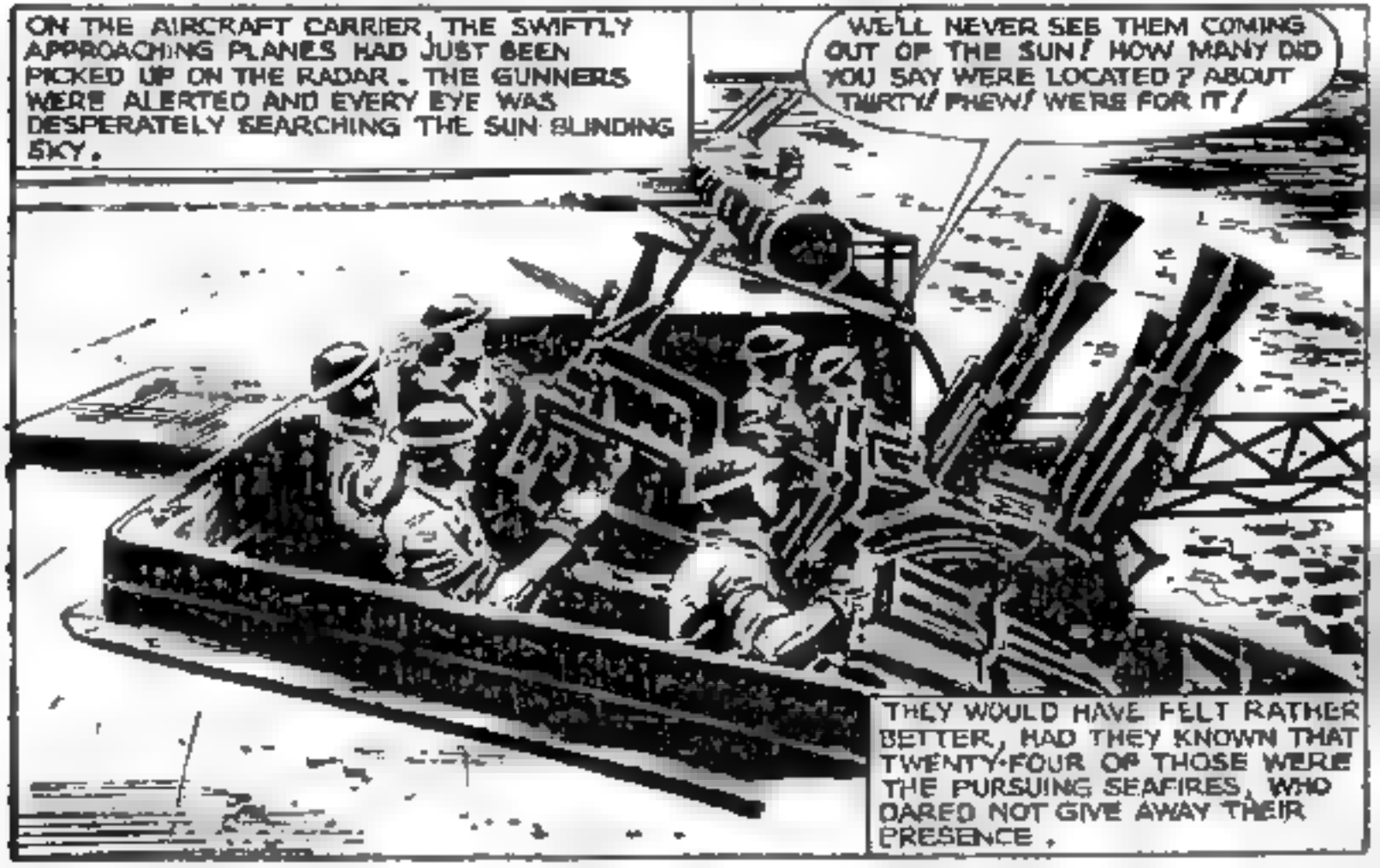
THE SEARCH WENT ON OVER THE VAST EMPTY SEA . . .
NOW WE'RE DOWN TO FIFTEEN! EVEN IF WE FIND HER, IT MAY BE TOO LATE! I'VE JUST LED TWENTY-FOUR PILOTS OUT TO THEIR DEATHS.

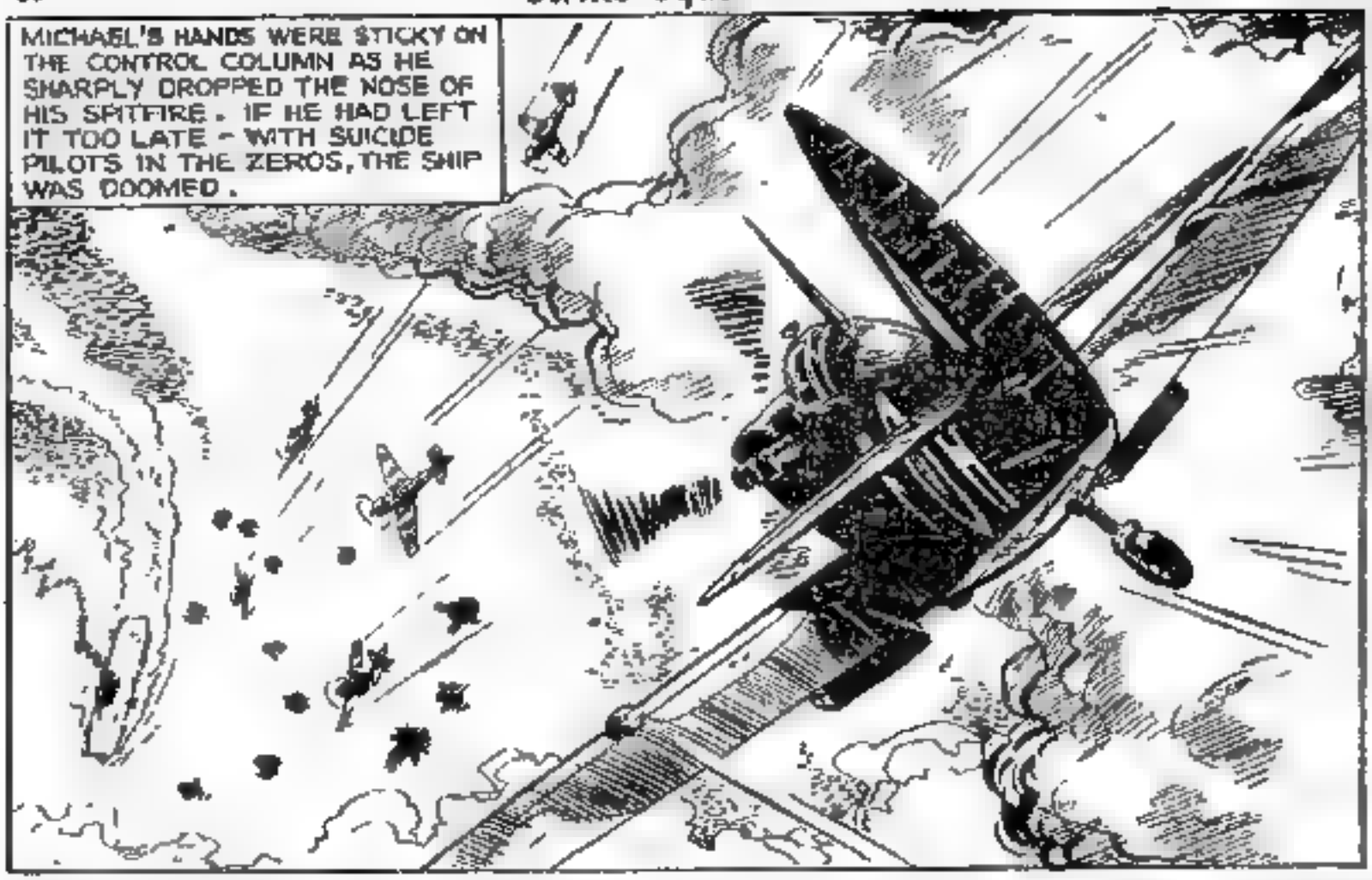
THEN, SUDDENLY, THERE WAS A CRACKLING ON THE R/T, AND A VOICE CAME THROUGH QUITE CLEARLY. THEY ALL HEARD IT.
BERTIE HERE, CHAPS! DON'T REPLY! THE JAP ZEROS HAVE BEEN TALKING TO BASE, RADIOING THEIR POSITION. THEY'RE SEARCHING FOR THE SHIP NOW, PROBABLY NOT FAR FROM YOU. HERE'S THEIR POSITION...

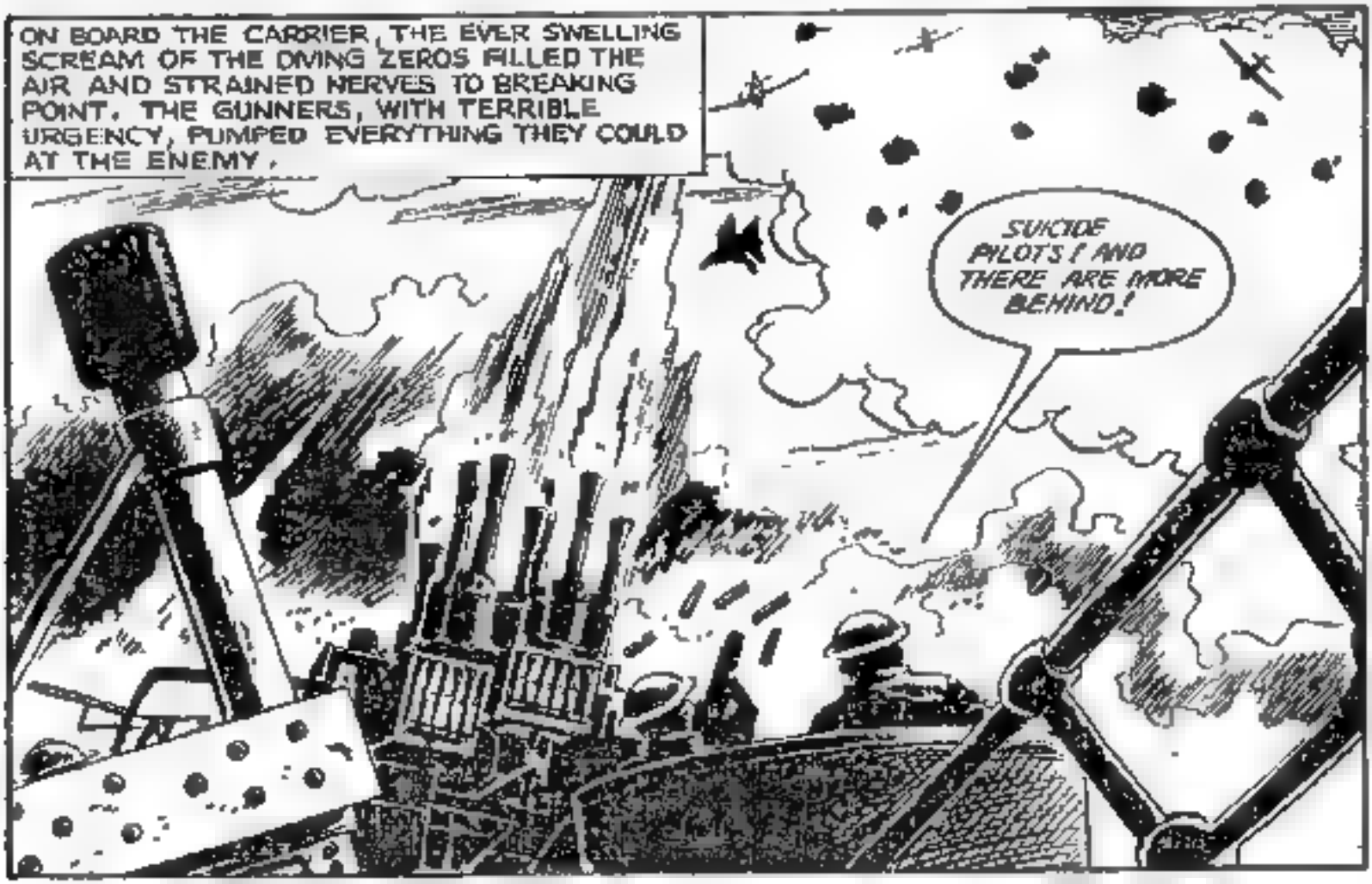
THEY ALL HEARD BERTIE GIVE THE POSITION. THEN THEY LOOKED OVER AT THEIR LEADER'S SEAFIRE— TO WATCH HIS EVERY MOVE.
HE'S CLIMBING TO STARBOARD... RIGHT, I'M WITH YOU, MICHAEL, CHUM!

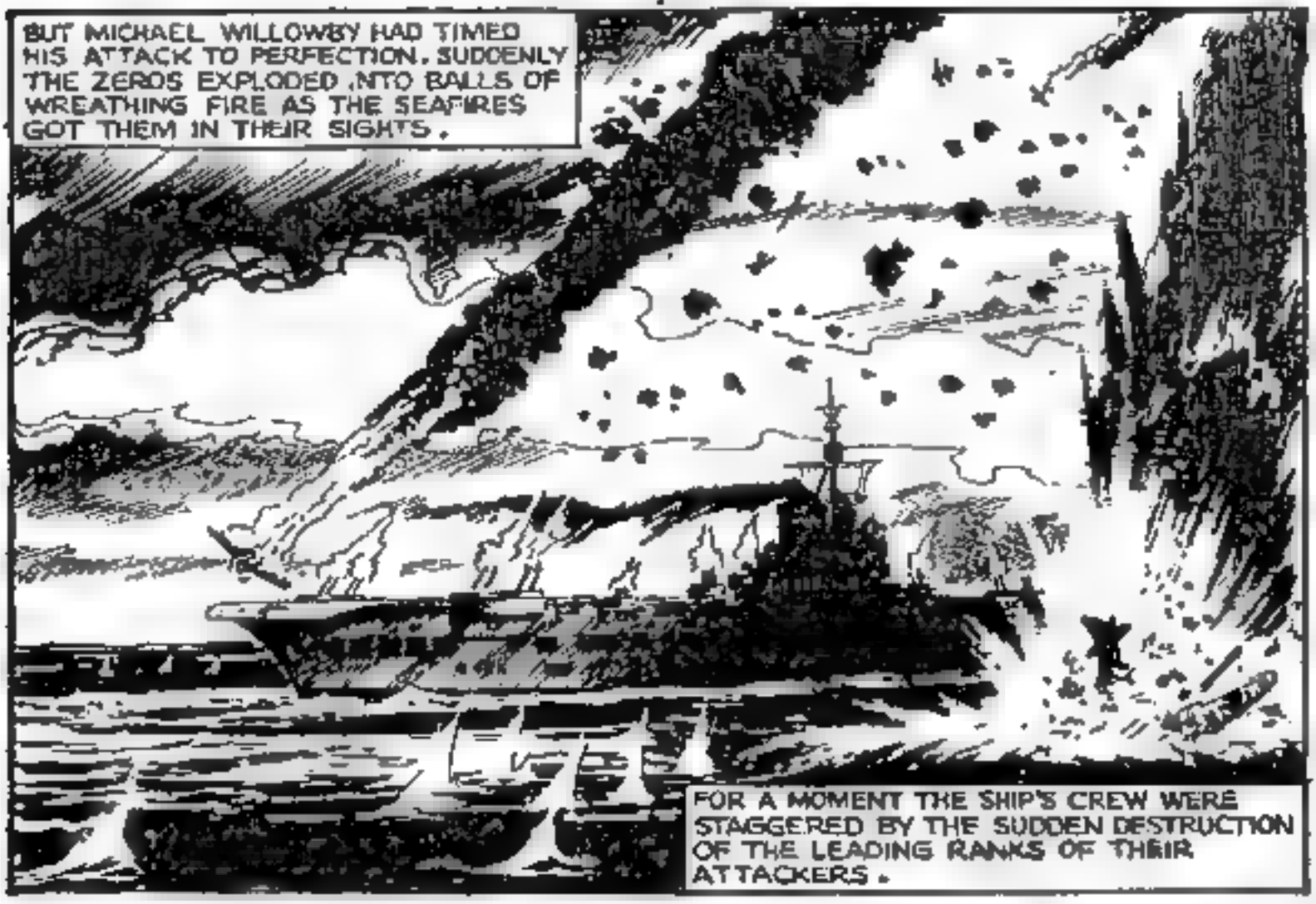

MICHAEL SET A NEW COURSE AND STARTED TO CLIMB. AT FIRST THEY BEGAN TO WONDER WHY HE WAS INTENT ON GAINING SO MUCH ALTITUDE, THEN IT DAWNED ON THEM.
OF COURSE! THE SUN'S HIGH IN THE EAST STILL ...HE'S GETTING ONTO A SUN-UP POSITION!

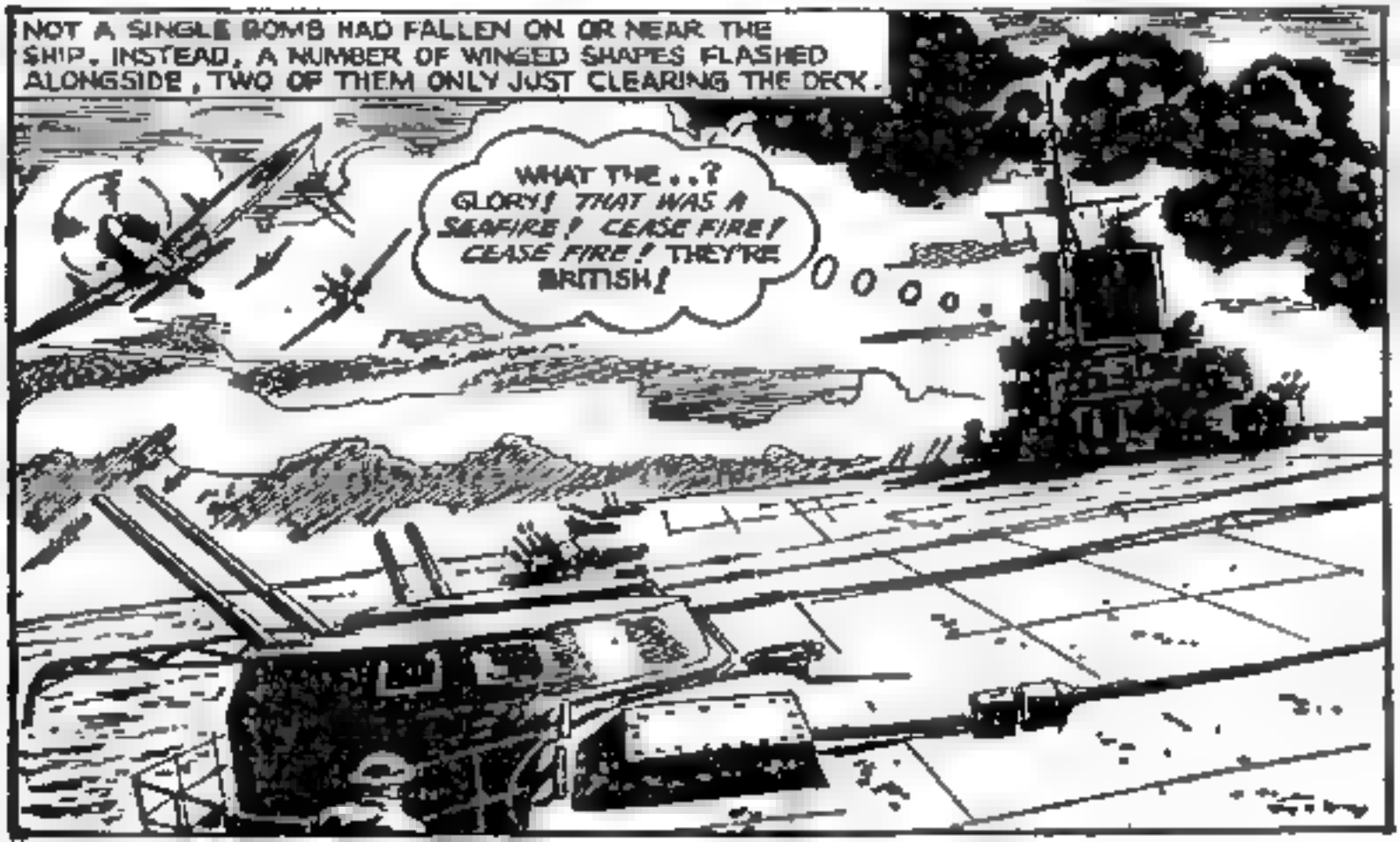

MICHAEL SUDDENLY WAGGLED HIS WINGS AGAIN. THEY ALL LOOKED DOWN . . . AND SAW THE ZEROS. FIVE SMALL SHAPES OVER THE SEA. BUT STILL MICHAEL HELD HIS COURSE IN THE SUN . . .
THEY MAY HAVE GOT A BEAD ON THE SHIP BY NOW. IF SO WE'LL FOLLOW THEM IN ON THEIR BACKS. IT'S NO GOOD ATTACKING THEM IN THE OPEN — THEY'RE MORE MANOEUVRABLE. OUR ONE ADVANTAGE IS THE SPIT'S SUPERIOR SPEED IN THE DIVE.


ON THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER, THE SWIFTLY APPROACHING PLANES HAD JUST BEEN PICKED UP ON THE RADAR. THE GUNNERS WERE ALERTED AND EVERY EYE WAS DESPERATELY SEARCHING THE SUN BLINDING SKY.
WE'LL NEVER SEE THEM COMING OUT OF THE SUN! HOW MANY DID YOU SAY WERE LOCATED? ABOUT THIRTY! PHEW! WE'RE FOR IT!
THEY WOULD HAVE FELT RATHER BETTER, HAD THEY KNOWN THAT TWENTY-FOUR OF THOSE WERE THE PURSUING SEAFIRES, WHO DARED NOT GIVE AWAY THEIR PRESENCE.


MICHAEL'S HANDS WERE STICKY ON THE CONTROL COLUMN AS HE SHARPLY DROPPED THE NOSE OF HIS SPITFIRE. IF HE HAD LEFT IT TOO LATE - WITH SUICIDE PILOTS IN THE ZEROS, THE SHIP WAS DOOMED.


ON BOARD THE CARRIER, THE EVER SWELLING SCREAM OF THE DIVING ZEROS FILLED THE AIR AND STRAINED NERVES TO BREAKING POINT. THE GUNNERS, WITH TERRIBLE URGENCY, PUMPED EVERYTHING THEY COULD AT THE ENEMY.
SUICIDE PILOTS! AND THERE ARE MORE BEHIND!

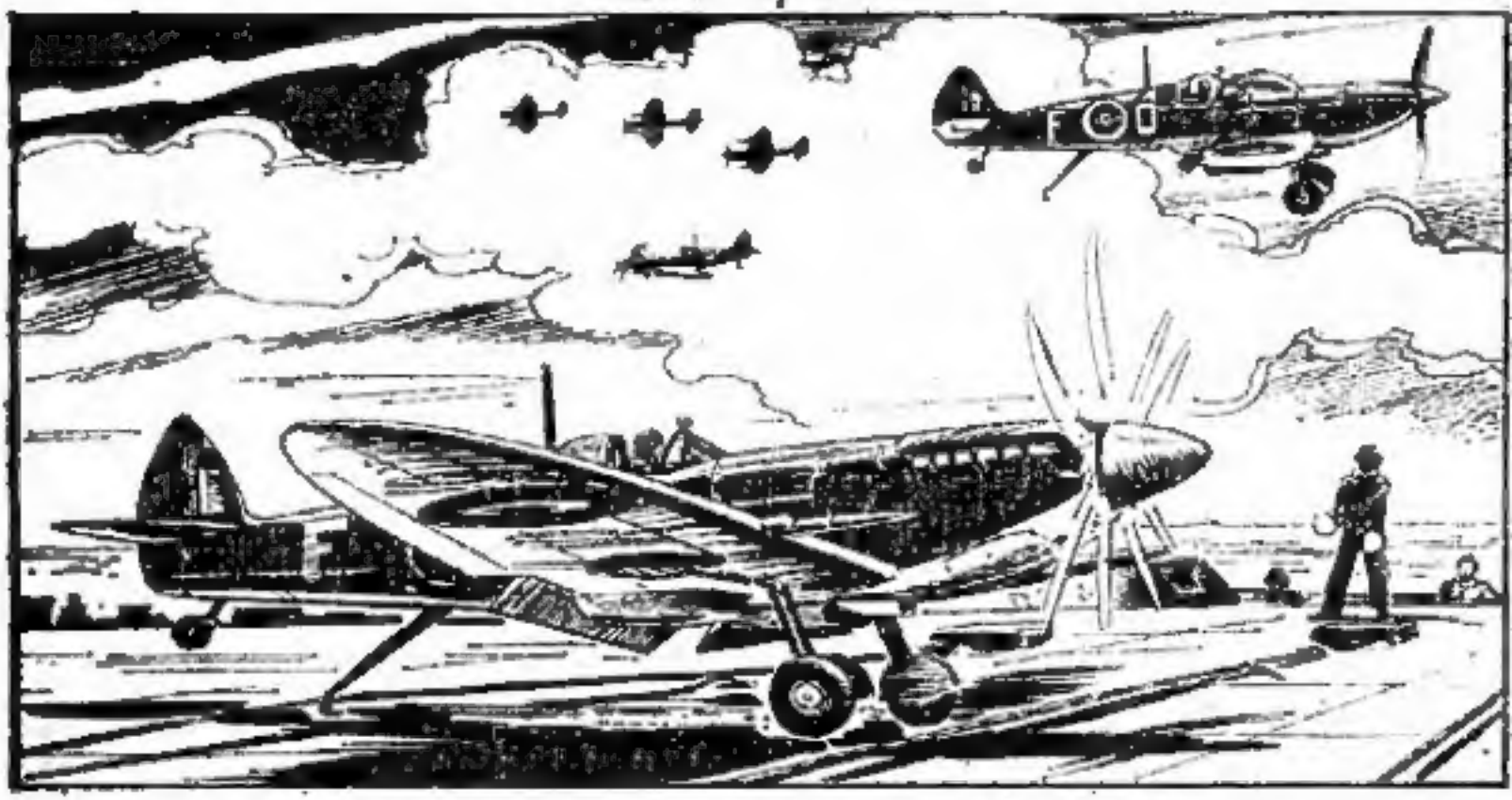

BUT MICHAEL WILLOWBY HAD TIMED HIS ATTACK TO PERFECTION. SUDDENLY THE ZEROS EXPLODED INTO BALLS OF WREATHING FIRE AS THE SEAFIRES GOT THEM IN THEIR SIGHTS.
FOR A MOMENT THE SHIP'S CREW WERE STAGGERED BY THE SUDDEN DESTRUCTION OF THE LEADING RANKS OF THEIR ATTACKERS.


NOT A SINGLE BOMB HAD FALLEN ON OR NEAR THE SHIP. INSTEAD, A NUMBER OF WINGED SHAPES FLASHED ALONGSIDE, TWO OF THEM ONLY JUST CLEARING THE DECK.
WHAT THE..? GLORY! THAT WAS A SEAFIRE! CEASE FIRE! CEASE FIRE! THEY'RE BRITISH!

SUB-LIEUTENANT DICK GLANVILLE RUSHED OVER TO THE BATTING POSITION AND GRABBED THE BATS . . .
HERE, I CAN DO THIS! BUT I'VE JUST TIME TO DO SOMETHING ELSE FIRST.

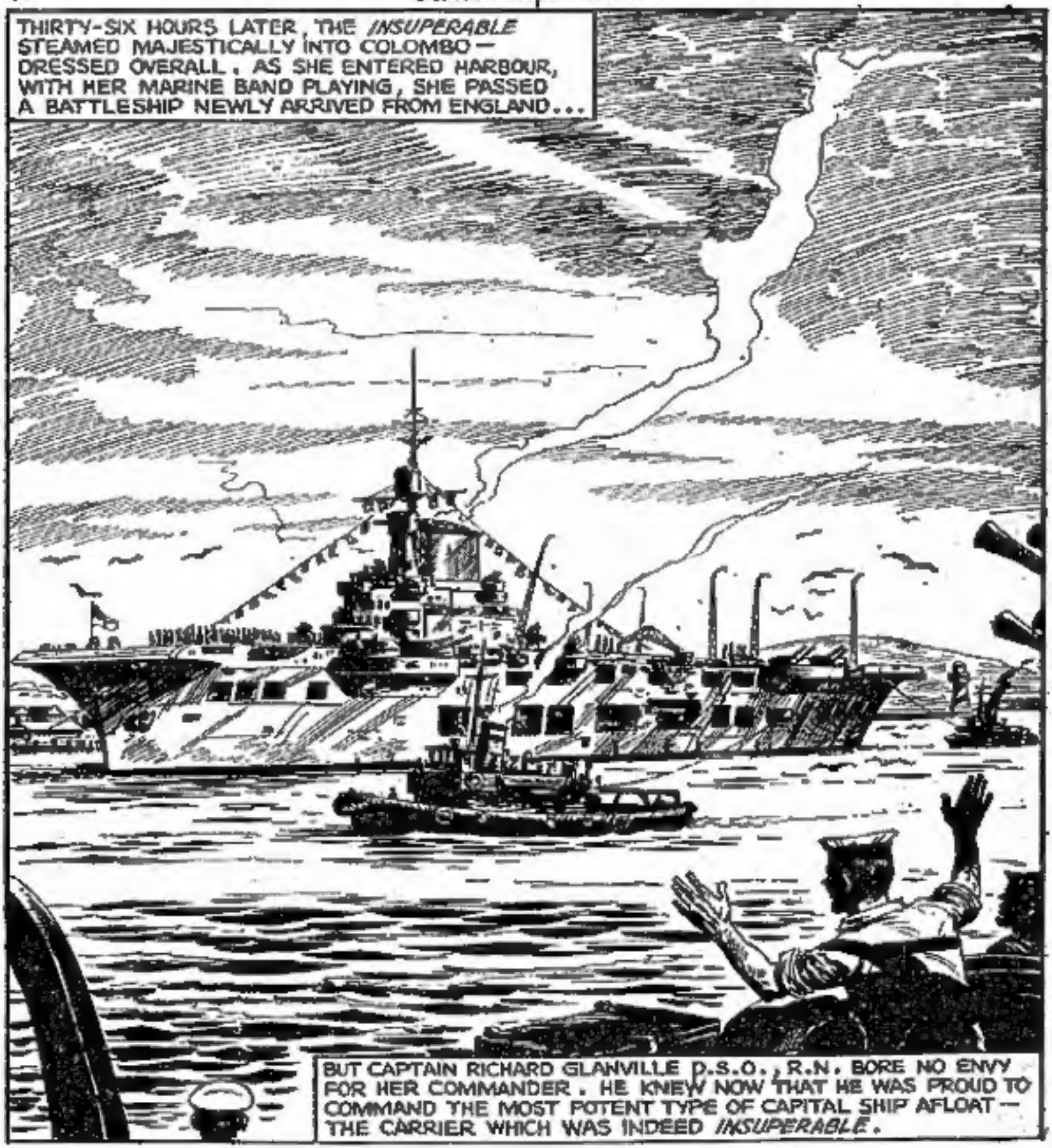
CAPTAIN GLANVILLE HIMSELF WENT TO THE SO RECENTLY DESERTED COMMANDER-FLYING'S POSITION. HE WAS BEGINNING TO FUSS OVER THEIR RETURN LIKE A HEN OVER HER CHICKENS.
SIR, THE BATSMAN IS SEMAPHORING TO THE BRIDGE . . . PERMISSION - TO - LAND ON - MY SHIPMATES - SAILORS HOME FROM THE SEA!

YEOMAN OF SIGNALS! MAKE TO THE BATSMAN . . . CAPTAIN HERE. PROUD TO HAVE - YOU ALL ABOARD! NOW, HERE THEY COME!



IT WAS A MOMENTOUS HOMECOMING. WHEN MICHAEL WILLOWBY REPORTED TO THE COMPASS PLATFORM, HE FOUND THE CAPTAIN DEEPLY MOVED.
...AND YOU REALISE BREWSTER'S PART IN IT ALL, SIR?
THAT I DO, MICHAEL! THEY'LL BE BRINGING HIM OUT ANYWAY. I'VE HEARD THE R.A.F. ARE FINALLY CLOSING DOWN THE ATOLL. THE JAPS ARE OVER-RUNNING EVERYWHERE.

BUT NOT WITH THEIR FLEET, I THINK SIR!
NO, BY HARRY! NOT WITH THEIR FLEET! WE'VE SEEN TO THAT — OR RATHER YOU HAVE! I DON'T THINK THE JAP NAVY WILL WORRY US IN INDIAN WATERS NOW.



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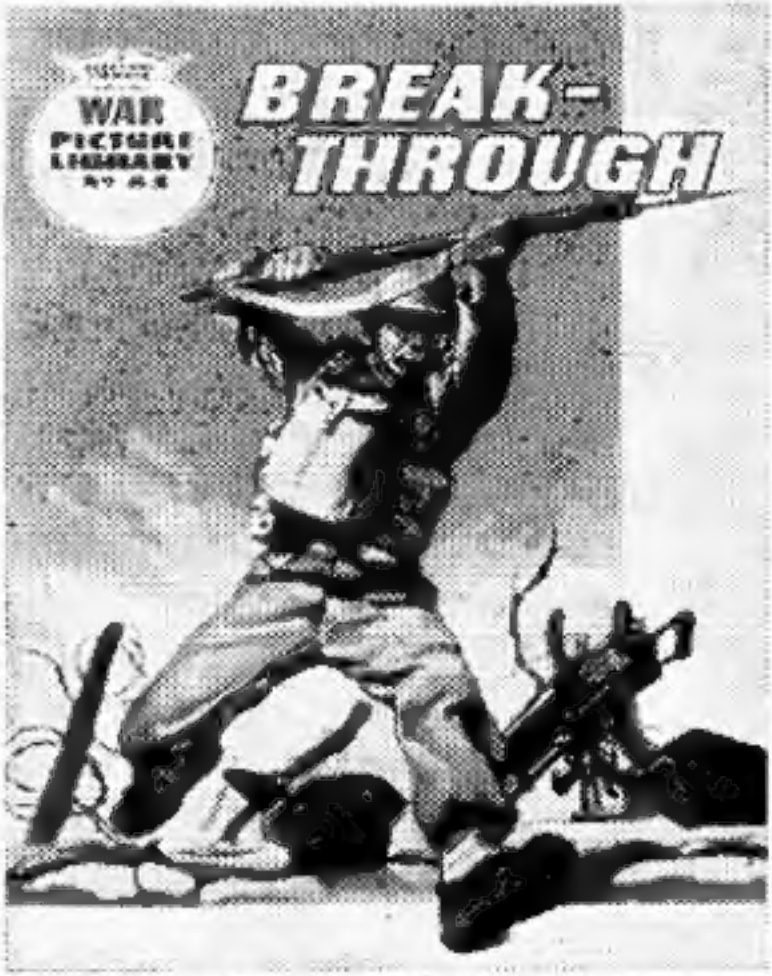

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